THE TANGLED THREADS

BY

ELEANOR H. PORTER

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OH, MONEY! MONEY! Illustrated.
THE ROAD TO UNDERSTANDING. Illustrated.
JUST DAVID. Illustrated.

The Tangled Threads

WITH FACES THAT EXPRESSED PUZZLED ANXIETY
SAT FIVE SILENT CHILDREN (*page* 267)

THE TANGLED THREADS

BY

ELEANOR H. PORTER

With Drawings By
Helen Mason Grose

Boston & New York
Houghton Mifflin Company
The Riverside Press
1919

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TO MY FRIEND

ANNIE SANFORD HEAD

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From drawings by Helen Mason Grose

The Tangled Threads

A Delayed Heritage

WHEN Hester was two years old a wheezy hand-organ would set her eyes to sparkling and her cheeks to dimpling, and when she was twenty the "Maiden's Prayer," played by a school-girl, would fill her soul with ecstasy.

To Hester, all the world seemed full of melody. Even the clouds in the sky sailed slowly along in time to a stately march in her brain, or danced to the tune of a merry schottische that sounded for her ears alone. And when she saw the sunset from the hill behind her home, there was always music then — low and tender if the colors were soft and pale-tinted, grand and awful if the wind blew shreds and tatters of storm-clouds across a purpling sky. All this was within Hester; but without —

There had been but little room in Hester's life for music. Her days were an endless round of dish-washing and baby-tending — first for

her mother, later for herself. There had been no money for music lessons, no time for piano practice. Hester's childish heart had swelled with bitter envy whenever she saw the coveted music roll swinging from some playmate's hand. At that time her favorite "make-believe" had been to play at going for a music lesson, with a carefully modeled roll of brown paper suspended by a string from her fingers.

Hester was forty now. Two sturdy boys and a girl of nine gave her three hungry mouths to feed and six active feet to keep in holeless stockings. Her husband had been dead two years, and life was a struggle and a problem. The boys she trained rigorously, giving just measure of love and care; but the girl — ah, Penelope should have that for which she herself had so longed. Penelope should take music lessons!

During all those nine years since Penelope had come to her, frequent dimes and quarters, with an occasional half-dollar, had found their way into an old stone jar on the top shelf in the pantry. It had been a dreary and pinching economy that had made possible this horde of

silver, and its effects had been only too visible in Hester's turned and mended garments, to say nothing of her wasted figure and colorless cheeks. Penelope was nine now, and Hester deemed it a fitting time to begin the spending of her treasured wealth.

First, the instrument: it must be a rented one, of course. Hester went about the labor of procuring it in a state of exalted bliss that was in a measure compensation for her long years of sacrifice.

Her task did not prove to be a hard one. The widow Butler, about to go South for the winter, was more than glad to leave her piano in Hester's tender care, and the dollar a month rent which Hester at first insisted upon paying was finally cut in half, much to the widow Butler's satisfaction and Hester's grateful delight. This much accomplished, Hester turned her steps toward the white cottage wherein lived Margaret Gale, the music teacher.

Miss Gale, careful, conscientious, but of limited experience, placed her services at the disposal of all who could pay the price—thirty-five cents an hour; and she graciously accepted

the name of her new pupil, entering "Penelope Martin" on her books for Saturday mornings at ten o'clock. Then Hester went home to tell her young daughter of the bliss in store for her.

Strange to say, she had cherished the secret of the old stone jar all these years, and had never told Penelope of her high destiny. She pictured now the child's joy, unconsciously putting her own nine-year-old music-hungry self in Penelope's place.

"Penelope," she called gently.

There was a scurrying of light feet down the uncarpeted back stairs, and Penelope, breathless, rosy, and smiling, appeared in the doorway.

"Yes, mother."

"Come with me, child," said Hester, her voice sternly solemn in her effort to keep from shouting her glad tidings before the time.

The woman led the way through the kitchen and dining-room and threw open the parlor door, motioning her daughter into the somber room. The rose-color faded from Penelope's cheeks.

"Why, mother! what — what is it? Have I been — naughty?" she faltered.

Mrs. Martin's tense muscles relaxed and she laughed hysterically.

"No, dearie, no! I—I have something to tell you," she answered, drawing the child to her and smoothing back the disordered hair. "What would you rather have—more than anything else in the world?" she asked; then, unable to keep her secret longer, she burst out, "I've got it, Penelope! —oh, I've got it!"

The little girl broke from the restraining arms and danced wildly around the room.

"Mother! Really? As big as me? And will it talk—say 'papa' and 'mamma,' you know?"

"What!"

Something in Hester's dismayed face brought the prancing feet to a sudden stop.

"It—it's a doll, is n't it?" the child stammered.

Hester's hands grew cold.

"A—a doll!" she gasped.

Penelope nodded—the light gone from her eyes.

For a moment the woman was silent; then she threw back her head with a little shake and laughed forcedly.

"A doll! — why, child, it's as much nicer than a doll as — as you can imagine. It's a piano, dear — a pi-a-no!" she repeated impressively, all the old enthusiasm coming back at the mere mention of the magic word.

"Oh!" murmured Penelope, with some show of interest.

"And you're to learn to play on it!"

"Oh-h!" said Penelope again, but with less interest.

"To play on it! Just think, dear, how fine that will be!" The woman's voice was growing wistful.

"Take lessons? Like Mamie, you mean?"

"Yes, dear."

"But — she has to practice and —"

"Of course," interrupted Hester eagerly. "That's the best part of it — the practice."

"Mamie don't think so," observed Penelope dubiously.

"Then Mamie can't know," rejoined Hester with decision, bravely combating the chill that was creeping over her. "Come, dear, help mother to clear a space, so we may be ready when the piano comes," she finished,

crossing the room and moving a chair to one side.

But when the piano finally arrived, Penelope was as enthusiastic as even her mother could wish her to be, and danced about it with proud joy. It was after the child had left the house, however, that Hester came with reverent step into the darkened room and feasted her eyes to her heart's content on the reality of her dreams.

Half fearfully she extended her hand and softly pressed the tip of her fourth finger to one of the ivory keys; then with her thumb she touched another a little below. The resulting dissonance gave her a vague unrest, and she gently slipped her thumb along until the harmony of a major sixth filled her eyes with quick tears.

"Oh, if I only could!" she whispered, and pressed the chord again, rapturously listening to the vibrations as they died away in the quiet room. Then she tiptoed out and closed the door behind her.

During the entire hour of that first Saturday morning lesson Mrs. Martin hovered near the

parlor door, her hands and feet refusing to perform their accustomed duties. The low murmur of the teacher's voice and an occasional series of notes were to Hester the mysterious rites before a sacred shrine, and she listened in reverent awe. When Miss Gale had left the house, Mrs. Martin hurried to Penelope's side.

"How did it go? What did she say? Play me what she taught you," she urged excitedly.

Penelope tossed a consequential head and gave her mother a scornful glance.

"Pooh! mother, the first lesson ain't much. I've got to practice."

"Of course," acknowledged Hester in conciliation; "but how? — what?"

"That — and that — and from there to there," said Penelope, indicating with a pink forefinger certain portions of the page before her.

"Oh!" breathed Hester, regarding the notes with eager eyes. Then timidly, "Play — that one."

With all the importance of absolute certainty Penelope struck *C*.

"And that one."

Penelope's second finger hit *F*.

"And that — and that — and that," swiftly demanded Hester.

Penelope's cheeks grew pink, but her fingers did not falter. Hester drew a long breath.

"Oh, how quick you've learned 'em!" she exclaimed.

Her daughter hesitated a tempted moment.

"Well — I — I learned the notes in school," she finally acknowledged, looking sidewise at her mother.

But even this admission did not lessen for Hester the halo of glory about Penelope's head. She drew another long breath.

"But what else did Miss Gale say? Tell me everything — every single thing," she reiterated hungrily.

That was not only Penelope's first lesson, but Hester's. The child, flushed and important with her sudden promotion from pupil to teacher, scrupulously repeated each point in the lesson, and the woman, humble and earnestly attentive, listened with bated breath. Then, Penelope, still airily consequential, practiced for almost an hour.

Monday, when the children were at school, Hester stole into the parlor and timidly seated herself at the piano.

"I think — I am almost sure I could do it," she whispered, studying with eager eyes the open book on the music rack. "I — I'm going to try, anyhow!" she finished resolutely.

And Hester did try, not only then, but on Tuesday, Wednesday, and thus until Saturday — that Saturday which brought with it a second lesson.

The weeks passed swiftly after that. Hester's tasks seemed lighter and her burdens less grievous since there was now that ever-present refuge — the piano. It was marvelous what a multitude of headaches and heartaches five minutes of scales, even, could banish; and when actual presence at the piano was impossible, there were yet memory and anticipation left her.

For two of these weeks Penelope practiced her allotted hour with a patience born of the novelty of the experience. The third week the "hour" dwindled perceptibly, and the fourth week it was scarcely thirty minutes long.

"Come, dearie, don't forget your practice," Hester sometimes cautioned anxiously.

"Oh, dear me suz!" Penelope would sigh, and Hester would watch her with puzzled eyes as she disconsolately pulled out the piano stool.

"Penelope," she threatened one day, "I shall certainly stop your lessons — you don't half appreciate them." But she was shocked and frightened at the relief that so quickly showed in her young daughter's eyes. Hester never made that threat again, for if Penelope's lessons stopped —

As the weeks lengthened into months, bits of harmony and snatches of melody became more and more frequent in Penelope's lessons, and the "exercises" were supplemented by occasional "pieces" — simple, yet boasting a name. But when Penelope played "Down by the Mill," one heard only the notes — accurate, rhythmic, an excellent imitation; when Hester played it, one might catch the whir of the wheel, the swish of the foaming brook, and almost the spicy smell of the sawdust, so vividly was the scene brought to mind.

Many a time, now, the old childhood dreams came back to Hester, and her fingers would drift into tender melodies and minor chords not on the printed page, until all the stifled love and longing of those dreary, colorless years of the past found voice at her finger-tips.

The stately marches and the rollicking dances of the cloud music came easily at her beck and call — now grave, now gay; now slow and measured, now tripping in weird harmonies and gay melodies.

Hester's blood quickened and her cheeks grew pink. Her eyes lost their yearning look and her lips their wistful curves.

Every week she faithfully took her lesson of Penelope, and she practiced only that when the children were about. It was when they were at school and she was alone that the great joy of this new-found treasure of improvising came to her, and she could set free her heart and soul on the ivory keys.

She was playing thus one night — forgetting time, self, and that Penelope would soon be home from school — when the child entered the house and stopped, amazed, in the parlor

doorway. As the last mellow note died into silence, Penelope dropped her books and burst into tears.

"Why, darling, what is it?" cried Hester. "What can be the matter?"

"I — I don't know," faltered Penelope, looking at her mother with startled eyes. "Why — why did n't you tell me?"

"Tell you?"

"That — that you could — p-play that way! I — I did n't know," she wailed with another storm of sobs, rushing into her mother's arms.

Hester's clasp tightened about the quivering little form and her eyes grew luminous.

"Dearie," she began very softly, "there was once a little girl — a *little* girl like you. She was very, very poor, and all her days were full of work. She had no piano, no music lessons — but, oh, how she longed for them! The trees and the grass and the winds and the flowers sang all day in her ears, but she could n't tell what they said. By and by, after many, many years, this little girl grew up and a dear little baby daughter came to her. She was still very, very poor, but she saved and scrimped, and

scrimped and saved, for she meant that this baby girl should not long and long for the music that never came. *She* should have music lessons."

"Was it — me?" whispered Penelope, with tremulous lips.

Hester drew a long breath.

"Yes, dear. I was the little girl long ago, and you are the little girl of to-day. And when the piano came, Penelope, I found in it all those songs that the winds and the trees used to sing to me. Now the sun shines brighter and the birds sing sweeter — and all this beautiful world is yours — all yours. Oh, Penelope, are n't you glad?"

Penelope raised a tear-wet face and looked into her mother's shining eyes.

"Glad? — oh, mother!" she cried fervently. Then very softly, "Mother — do you think — could you teach *me?* — Oh, I want to play just like that — just like that!"

The Folly of Wisdom

UNTIL his fiftieth year Jason Hartsorn knew nothing whatever about the position of his liver, kidneys, lungs, heart, spleen, and stomach except that they must be somewhere inside of him; then he attended the auction of old Doctor Hemenway's household effects and bid off for twenty-five cents a dilapidated clothes basket filled with books and pamphlets. Jason's education as to his anatomy began almost at once then, for on the way home he fished out a coverless volume from the basket and became lost in awed wonder over a pictured human form covered from scalp to the toes with scarlet, vine-like tracings.

"For the land's sake, Jason!" ejaculated Mrs. Hartsorn, as her husband came puffing into the kitchen with his burden an hour later. "Now, what trash have you been buyin'?"

"'Trash'!" panted Jason, carefully setting the basket down. "I guess you won't call it

no 'trash' when you see what 't is! It's books — learnin', Hitty. I been readin' one of 'em, too. Look a-here," and he pulled up his shirt sleeve and bared a brawny arm; "that's all full of teeny little pipes an' cords. Why, if I could only skin it —"

"Jason!" screamed his wife, backing away.

"Pooh! 'T ain't nothin' to fret over," retorted Jason airily. "Besides, you've got 'em too — ev'ry one has; see!" He finished by snatching up the book and spreading before her horrified eyes the pictured figure with its scarlet, vine-like tracings.

"Oh-h!" shivered the woman, and fled from the room.

Shivers and shudders became almost second nature to Mehitable Hartsorn during the days that followed. The highly colored, carefully explained illustrations of the kidneys, liver, heart, and lungs which the books displayed were to her only a little less terrifying than the thought that her own body contained the fearsome things in reality; while to her husband these same illustrations were but the delightful means to a still more delightful end — finding

"WHY, IF I COULD ONLY SKIN IT"

in his own sturdy frame the position of every organ shown.

For a month Jason was happy. Then it was suddenly borne in upon him that not always were these fascinating new acquaintances of his in a healthy condition. At once he began to pinch and pummel himself, and to watch for pains, being careful, meanwhile, to study the books unceasingly, so that he might know just where to look for the pains when they should come. He counted his pulse daily — hourly, if he apprehended trouble; and his tongue he examined critically every morning, being particular to notice whether or not it were pale, moist, coated, red, raw, cracked, or tremulous.

Jason was not at all well that spring. He was threatened successively with typhoid fever, appendicitis, consumption, and cholera, and only escaped a serious illness in each case by the prompt application of remedies prescribed in his books. His wife ran the whole gamut of emotions from terror, worry, and sympathy down to indifference and good-natured tolerance, reaching the last only after the repeated failure of Jason's diseases to materialize.

It was about a week after Jason had mercifully escaped an attack of the cholera that he came into the kitchen one morning and dropped heavily into the nearest chair.

"I tell ye, my heart ain't right," he announced to his wife. "It's goin' jest like Jehu — 'palpitation,' they call it; an' I've got 'shortness of breath,' too," he finished triumphantly.

"Hm-m; did ye catch her at last?" asked Mehitable with mild interest.

Jason looked up sharply.

" 'Catch her'! Catch who?" he demanded.

"Why, the colt, of course! How long did ye have ter chase her?" Mrs. Hartsorn's carefully modulated voice expressed curiosity, and that was all.

Jason flushed angrily.

"Oh, I know what ye mean," he snapped. "Ye think thar don't nothin' ail me, an' that jest fetchin' Dolly from the pasture did it all. But I know what them symptoms means; they mean heart disease, woman, — 'cardiac failure,' — that's what 't is." Jason leaned back in his chair and drew a long breath. When he

could remember his "book-learnin' " and give a high-sounding name to his complaint, his gratification was enhanced.

"Hm-m; mebbe 't is, Jason," retorted his wife; "but I'm a-thinkin' that when a man of your heft and years goes kitin' 'round a ten-acre lot at the tail of a fly-away colt, he'll have all that kind of heart disease he wants, an' still live ter die of somethin' else!" And Mehitable cheerfully banged the oven door after making sure that her biscuits were not getting too brown.

As it happened, however, there was really no chance for Jason's heart disease to develop, for that night he scratched his finger, which brought about the much more imminent danger of blood-poisoning—"toxemia," Jason said it was. For a time the whole household was upset, and Mehitable was kept trotting from morning till night with sponges, cloths, cotton, and bowls of curious-smelling liquids, while Jason discoursed on antiseptics, germs, bacteria, microbes, and bacilli.

The finger was nearly well when he suddenly discovered that, after all, the trouble might

have been lock-jaw instead of blood-poisoning. He at once began studying the subject so that he might be prepared should the thing occur again. He was glad, later, that he had done so, for the Fourth of July and a toy pistol brought all his recently acquired knowledge into instant requisition.

"If it does come, it's 'most likely ter be fatal," he said excitedly to his wife, who was calmly bathing a slight graze on his hand. "An' ye want ter watch me," he added, catching up a book with his uninjured hand and turning to a much-thumbed page for reference. "Now, listen. Thar's diff'rent kinds of it. They're all 'te-ta-nus,' but ye got to watch out ter find out which kind 't is. If I shut my jaws up tight, it's 'lock-jaw.' If I bend backwards, it's 'o-pis-tho-to-nos.' If I bend forwards, it's 'em-pros-tho-to-nos'; an' if I bend ter one side, it's 'pleu-ro-tho-to-nos,'" he explained, pronouncing the long words after a fashion of his own. "Now, remember," he finished. "Like enough I shan't know enough ter tell which kind 't is myself, nor which way I am a-leanin'."

"No, of course not, dear," agreed Mehitable cheerfully; "an' I'll remember," she promised, as she trotted away with her salves and bowls and bandages.

For some days Jason "tried" his jaw at regular intervals, coming to the conclusion at last that fate once more was kind, and that "te-ta-nus" was to pass him by.

The summer ended and autumn came. Jason was glad that the cold weather was approaching. The heat had been trying. He had almost suffered a sunstroke, and twice a mosquito bite had given him much trouble — he had feared that he would die of malignant pustule. His relief at the coming of cool weather was short-lived, however, for one of the neighboring towns developed a smallpox scare, and as he discovered a slight rash soon after passing through the place, he thought best to submit to vaccination. He caught a bad cold, too, and was sure pneumonia was setting in — that is, he would have been sure, only his throat was so sore that he could not help thinking it might be diphtheria.

Realizing the seriousness of the situation,

and determining to settle once for all the vexed question, he pored over his books in an exhaustive search for symptoms. It was then that he rushed into the presence of his wife one morning, his face drawn, his eyes wildly staring, and an open book in his shaking hand.

"Hitty, Hitty," he cried; "jest listen ter this! How 'm I goin' ter tell what ails me, I should like ter know, if I don't ache where I'm sick? Why, Hitty, I can't never tell! Jest listen:

The location of pain is not always at the seat of disease. In hip disease the pain is not first felt in the hip, but in the knee-joint. In chronic inflammation of the liver the pain is generally most severe in the right shoulder and arm.

"Only think, Hitty, 'In the right shoulder and arm'! Why, I had a pain right in that spot only yesterday. So that's what I've got — 'hip-disease'! an' — oh, no," he broke off suddenly, consulting his book, " 't ain't hip-disease when the shoulder aches — it's the liver, then."

"Well, well, Jason, I don't think I should fret," soothed Mehitable. "If ye don't know,

where's the diff'rence? Now I've got a pain right now in my little toe. Like enough that means I'm comin' down with the mumps; eh?"

"Hitty!" Jason's voice was agonized. He had been paying no attention to his wife's words, but had been reading on down the page. "Hitty, listen! It says — 'Absence of pain in any disease where ordinarily it should be present is an unfavorable sign.' An', Hitty, I hain't got an ache — not a single ache, this minute!"

There was no possibility of quieting Jason after that, and the days that followed were hard for all concerned. If he had an ache he was terrified; if he did not have one, he was more so. He began, also, to distrust his own powers of diagnosis, and to study all the patent medicine advertisements he could lay his hands on. He was half comforted, half appalled, to read them. Far from being able to pick out his own particular malady from among the lot, he was forced to admit that as near as he could make out he had one or more symptoms of each and every disease that was mentioned.

"Now, Hitty, I'll leave it to you," he submitted plaintively. "Here's 'Dread of impending evil.' Now I've got that, sure; ye know I'm always thinkin' somethin' dreadful's goin' ter happen. 'Sparks before the eyes.' There! I had them only jest ter-day. I was sweepin' out the barn, an' I see 'em hoppin' up an' down in a streak of sunshine that come through a crack. 'Variable appetite.' Now, Hitty, don't ye remember? Yesterday I wanted pie awful, an' I ate a whole one; well, this mornin' seems as if I never wanted ter see an apple pie again. Now, if that ain't 'variable,' I don't know what is. 'Inquietude.' "

"Humph! You 've got that all right," cut in Mehitable.

"'Weakness.' I hain't got a mite o' strength, Hitty," he complained. "An' thar 's dizziness, too, — I can't chase the calf three times round the barnyard but what my head is jest swimmin'! An' Hitty," — his voice grew impressive, — "Hitty, I've got ev'ry one of them six symptoms, ev'ry blamed one of 'em, an' I picked 'em out of six diff'rent advertisements

— six! Now, Hitty, which disease is it I've got? That's what I want ter know — which?"

His wife could not tell him; in fact, no one could tell him, and in sheer desperation Jason answered all six of the advertisements, determined to find out for a certainty what ailed him.

In due course the answers came. Jason read one, then another, then another, until the contents of the entire six had been mastered. Then he raised his head and gazed straight into his wife's eyes.

"Hitty," he gasped. "I've got 'em all! An' I've got ter take the whole six medicines ter cure me!"

Even Mehitable was stirred then. For one long minute she was silent, then she squared her shoulders, and placed her hands on her hips.

"Jason Hartsorn," she began determinedly, "this thing has gone jest as fur as I'm goin' to stand it. Do you bundle yourself off ter Boston an' hunt up the biggest doctor you can find. If he says somethin' ails ye, I'll believe him, an' nuss ye ter the best of my ability; but

as fur nussin' ye through six things — an' them all ter once — I won't! So there."

Twenty-four hours later Jason faced a square-jawed, smooth-shaven man who looked sharply into his eyes with a curt, "Well, sir?"

Jason cleared his throat.

"Well, ye see, doctor," he began, "somethin' ails me, an' I ain't quite sure what 't is. I've been poorly since last spring, but it 's been kind of puzzlin'. Now, fur instance: I had a pain in my knee, so I felt sure 't was hip-disease, but it jumped ter my shoulder, so 'course then I knew 't was my liver."

The doctor made a sudden movement. He swung squarely around in his office chair and faced Jason.

Jason was pleased — his learning had already made an impression! He raised his chin and went on with renewed confidence.

"Ye see I was afraid my liver, or mebbe one o' my kidneys, was hardenin' or floatin' round loose, or doin' somethin' else they had n't orter. Lately, thar's been days, lots of 'em, when I hain't had no pain — not a mite, an' 'course that's the worst symptom of all. Then some-

times thar's been such shootin' pains that I kind o' worried fur fear 't was locomotive ataxia; but mebbe the very next day it would change so's I did n't know but 't was appendicitis, an' that my vermi-er-vermicelli appendix was the trouble."

The doctor coughed — he not only coughed, but he choked, so that Jason had to pause for a moment; but it was only for a moment.

"I 'most had diphtheria, an' pneumonia, an' smallpox this fall," he resumed complacently; "an' thar's six other diseases that I got symptoms of — that is, partly, you know: — 'Variable appetite,' an' 'Inquietude,' an' all that."

"Hm-m," said the doctor, slowly, his eyes averted. "Well, we 'll — make an examination. Come in here, please," he added, leading the way to an inner room.

"Gorry!" ejaculated Jason some minutes later, when he was once more back in his chair, "I should think you might know what ails me now — after all that thumpin' an' poundin' an' listenin'!"

"I do," said the doctor.

"Well, 't ain't — six of 'em; is it?" There

was mingled hope and fear in Jason's voice. If it were six — he could see Hitty's face!

"Any physicians in your family?" asked the doctor, ignoring Jason's question.

Jason shook his head.

"Hm-m," commented the doctor. "Ever been any?"

"Why, not as I know of, sir," murmured Jason wonderingly.

"No? Where did you get them, then, — those medical books?"

Jason stared.

"Why, how in thunder did you know —" he began.

But the doctor interrupted him.

"Never mind that. You have them, have n't you?"

"Why, yes; I bought 'em at an auction. I bought 'em last —"

"Spring — eh?" supplied the doctor.

Jason's mouth fell open.

"Never mind," laughed the doctor again, his hand upraised. "Now to business!" And his face grew suddenly grave. "You're in a bad way, my friend."

"B-bad way?" stammered Jason. "It — it is n't six that ails me?"

It was all fear this time in Jason's voice; some way the doctor's face had carried conviction.

"No; you are threatened with more than six."

"Wha-at?" Jason almost sprang from his seat. "But, doctor, they ain't — dangerous!"

"But they are, very!"

"All of them? Why, doctor, how — how many are thar?"

The doctor shook his head.

"I could not count them," he replied, not meeting Jason's eyes.

"Oh-h!" gasped Jason, and shook in his shoes. There was a long silence. "An' will I — die?" he almost whispered.

"We all must — sometime," returned the doctor, slowly, as if weighing his words; "but you will die long before your time — unless you do one thing."

"I'll do it, doctor, I'll do it — if I have ter mortgage the farm," chattered Jason frenziedly. "I'll do anythin' — anythin'; only tell me what it is."

"I will tell you," declared the doctor briskly, with a sudden change of manner, whisking about in his chair. "Go home and burn those medical books — every single one of them."

"Burn them! Why, doctor, them's the very things that made me know I was sick. I should n't 'a' come ter you at all if it had n't been fur them."

"Exactly!" agreed the doctor, rubbing his hands together. "That's just what I thought. You were well before, were n't you?"

"Why, yes, — that is, I did n't know I was sick," corrected Jason.

"Hm-m; well, you won't know it now if you'll go home and burn those books. If you don't burn them you'll have every disease there is in them, and some one of them will be the death of you. As it is now, you're a well man, but I would n't trust one organ of your anatomy within a rod of those books an hour longer!"

He said more — much more; and that his words were not without effect was shown no later than that same evening when Jason burst into the kitchen at home.

"Hitty, Hitty, thar ain't six, thar ain't one, thar ain't nothin' that ails me," he cried jubilantly, still under the sway of the joy that had been his when the great doctor had told him there was yet one chance for his life. "Thar ain't a single thing!"

"Well, now, ain't that nice?" murmured Hitty, as she drew up the chairs. "Come, Jason, supper's ready."

"An' Hitty, I'm goin' ter burn 'em up — them books of Hemenway's," continued Jason confidentially. "They ain't very good readin', after all, an' like enough they're kind of out of date, bein' so old. I guess I'll go fetch 'em now," he added as he left the room. "Why, Hitty, they're — gone!" he cried a minute later from the doorway.

"Gone? Books?" repeated Mehitable innocently. "Oh, yes, I remember now. I must 'a' burned 'em this mornin'. Ye see, they cluttered up so. Come, Jason, set down."

And Jason sat down. But all the evening he wondered. "Was it possible, after all, that Hitty — knew?"

Crumbs

The Story of a Discontented Woman

THE floor was untidy, the sink full of dirty dishes, and the stove a variegated thing of gray and dull red. At the table, head bowed on outstretched arms, was Kate Merton, twenty-one, discouraged, and sole mistress of the kitchen in which she sat. The pleasant-faced, slender little woman in the doorway paused irresolutely on the threshold, then walked with a brisk step into the room.

"Is the water hot?" she asked cheerily.

The girl at the table came instantly to her feet.

"Aunt Ellen!" she cried, aghast.

"Oh, yes, it's lovely," murmured the lady, peering into the copper boiler on the stove.

"But, auntie, you — I" — the girl paused helplessly.

"Let's see, are these the wipers?" pursued Mrs. Howland, her hand on one of the towels hanging behind the stove.

Kate's face hardened.

"Thank you, Aunt Ellen. You are very kind, but I can do quite well by myself. You will please go into the living-room. I don't allow company to do kitchen work."

"Of course not!" acquiesced Mrs. Howland imperturbably. "But your father's sister is n't company, you know. Let's see, you put your clean dishes here?"

"But, Aunt Ellen, you must n't," protested Kate. "At home you do nothing — nothing all day." A curious expression came into Mrs. Howland's face, but Kate Merton did not seem to notice. "You have servants to do everything, even to dressing you. No, you can't wipe my dishes."

For a long minute there was silence in the kitchen. Mrs. Howland, wiper in hand, stood looking out the window. Her lips parted, then closed again. When she finally turned and spoke, the old smile had come back to her face.

"Then if that is the case, it will be all the more change for me to do something," she said pleasantly. "I want to do them, Kate. It will be a pleasure to me."

"Pleasure!"

Mrs. Howland's clear laugh rang through the kitchen at the scorn expressed in the one word.

"And is it so bad as that?" she demanded merrily.

"Worse!" snapped Kate. "I simply loathe dishes!" But a shamed smile came to her lips, and she got the pans and water, making no further objection.

"I like pretty dishes," observed Mrs. Howland, after a time, breaking a long silence. "There's a certain satisfaction in restoring them to their shelves in all their dainty, polished beauty."

"I should like them just as well if they always stayed there, and did n't come down to get all crumbs and grease in the sink," returned the other tartly.

"Oh, of course," agreed Mrs. Howland, with a smile; "but, as long as they don't, why, we might as well take what satisfaction there is in putting them in shape again."

"Don't see it — the satisfaction," retorted

Kate, and her aunt dropped the subject where it was.

The dishes finished and the kitchen put to rights, the two women started for the chambers and the bed-making. Kate's protests were airily waved aside by the energetic little woman who promptly went to pillow-beating and mattress-turning.

"How fresh and sweet the air smells!" cried Mrs. Howland, sniffing at the open window.

"Lilacs," explained Kate concisely.

"Hm-m — lovely!"

"Think so? I don't care for the odor myself," rejoined Kate.

The other shot a quick look from under lowered lids. Kate's face expressed mere indifference. The girl evidently had not meant to be rude.

"You don't like them?" cried Mrs. Howland. "Oh, I do! My dear, you don't half appreciate what it is to have such air to breathe. Only think, if you were shut up in a brick house on a narrow street as I am!"

"Think!" retorted Kate, with sudden heat.

"I'd like to do something besides 'think'! I'd like to try it!"

"You mean you'd like to leave here? — to go to the city?"

"I do, certainly. Aunt Ellen, I'm simply sick of chicken-feeding and meal-getting. Why, if it was n't for keeping house for father I'd have been off to New York or Boston years ago!"

"But your home — your friends!"

"Commonplace — uninteresting!" declared Kate, disposing of both with a wave of her two hands. "The one means endless sweeping and baking; the other means sewing societies, and silly gossip over clothes, beaux, and crops."

Mrs. Howland laughed, though she sobered instantly.

"But there must be something, some one that you enjoy," she suggested.

Kate shook her head wearily.

"Not a thing, not a person," she replied; adding with a whimsical twinkle, "they're all like the dishes, Aunt Ellen, — bound to accumulate crumbs and scraps, and do nothing but clutter up."

"Oh, Kate, Kate," remonstrated Mrs. How-

land, "what an incorrigible girl you are!" As she spoke her lips smiled, but her eyes did not — there was a wistful light in their blue depths that persistently stayed there all through the day as she watched her niece.

At ten, and again at half-past, some neighbors dropped in. After they had gone Kate complained because the forenoon was so broken up. The next few hours were free from callers, and at the supper table Kate grumbled because the afternoon was so stupid and lonesome. When Mr. Merton came in bringing no mail, Kate exclaimed that nobody ever answered her letters, and that she might just as well not write; yet when the next day brought three, she sighed over the time "wasted in reading such long letters."

The week sped swiftly and Sunday night came. Mrs. Howland's visit was all but finished. She was going early the next morning.

Sunday had not been an unalloyed joy. Mrs. Howland and her niece had attended church, but to Kate the sermon was too long, and the singing too loud. The girl mentioned both in a listless way, at the same time saying that it

was always like that except when the sermon was interesting, then it was too short and the choir took up all the time there was with their tiresome singing.

Dinner had been long in preparation, and, in spite of Mrs. Howland's gladly given assistance, the dish-washing and the kitchen-tidying had been longer still. All day Kate's step had been more than lagging, and her face more than discontented. In the twilight, as the two women sat together, Mrs. Howland laid hold of her courage with both hands and spoke.

"Kate, dear, is n't there something, anything, worth while to you?"

"Nothing, auntie. I feel simply buried alive."

"But can't you think of anything —"

"Think of anything!" interrupted the girl swiftly. "Of course I can! If I had money — or lived somewhere else — or could go somewhere, or see something once in a while, it would be different; but *here* —!"

Mrs. Howland shook her head.

"But it would n't be different, my dear," she demurred.

"Why, of course it would!" laughed Kate bitterly. "It could n't help it."

Again Mrs. Howland shook her head. Then a whimsical smile crossed her face.

"Kate," she said, "there are crumbs on the plates out in the world just the same as there are here; and if here you teach yourself to see nothing but crumbs, you will see nothing but crumbs out there. In short, dissatisfaction with everyday living is the same joy-killer whether in town or city, farmhouse or palace. Oh, I'm preaching, I know, dear," went on Mrs. Howland hurriedly, as she saw the angry light in the other's eyes, "but — I had to speak — you don't know how it 's growing on you. Come, let's kiss and make up; then think it over."

Kate frowned, then laughed constrainedly.

"Don't worry, aunt," she replied, rising, and just touching her aunt's lips with her own. "I still think it would be different out there; but — I suppose you'll always remain unconvinced, for I shall never have the chance to prove it. My plates won't belong anywhere but in Hopkinsville cupboards! Come, will you play to me?"

When Mrs. Howland returned from England, one of the first letters she received after reaching home was a cordial invitation from her dead brother's daughter, Kate, to visit her.

In the last five years Mrs. Howland had seen her niece but once. That was during the sad, hurried days just following Mr. Merton's sudden death four years before. Since then Mrs. Howland had been abroad and there had been many changes at the little farmhouse in Hopkinsville. The farm had been sold, and Kate had married and had gone to Boston to live. Beyond the facts that Kate's husband was older than she, and was a man of considerable means, Mrs. Howland knew little of her niece's present circumstances. It was with curiosity, as well as pleasure, that she accepted Kate's invitation, and took the train specified.

At the South Station Mrs. Howland found a stylishly gowned, smiling young woman with a cordial welcome. An imposing carriage with a liveried coachman waited to take her to Kate's home.

"Oh, what handsome horses!" cried Mrs.

Howland appreciatively, as she stepped into the carriage.

"Yes, are n't they," agreed Kate. "If only they matched better, they'd be perfect. I wish both had stars on their foreheads!"

"Let me see, you are on Beacon Street, I believe," remarked Mrs. Howland, as the carriage left the more congested quarter of the city.

Kate frowned. "Yes," she answered. "I wanted Commonwealth Avenue, but Mr. Blake preferred Beacon. All his people live on Beacon, and have for years."

"Oh, but Beacon is lovely, I think."

"Do you? Well, perhaps; but Commonwealth is so much wider and more roomy. I could breathe on Commonwealth Avenue, I think!"

"And don't you, where you are?" laughed Mrs. Howland.

Her niece made a playfully wry face.

"Just pant — upon my word I do! Not one full breath do I draw," she asserted.

"Hm-m; I've always understood that deep breathing was necessary for health," com-

mented Mrs. Howland, with a critical, comprehensive glance; "but — you seem to thrive all right! You are looking well, Kate."

"I don't feel so. I have the most shocking headaches," the other retorted. "Ah, here we are!"

Mrs. Howland followed her hostess up a short flight of stone steps into a handsome hall. A well-trained maid was at once in attendance, and another, a little later, helped her unpack.

"My dear," Mrs. Howland said to her niece when she came downstairs, "what a lucky woman you are to have two such maids! They are treasures!"

Kate's hands flew to her head with a gesture of despair.

"Maids! — Aunt Ellen, don't ever say the word to me, I beg! I never keep one more than a month, and I'm shaking in my shoes this very minute. There 's a new cook in the kitchen, and I have n't the least idea what your dinner will be."

"I'm not a bit worried," rejoined Mrs. Howland. "What a pretty home you have, Kate," she added, tactfully changing the subject.

"Think so? I'm glad you like it. I sometimes wish I could get hold of the man who built this house, though, and give him a piece of my mind. The rooms on this floor are so high studded they give me the shivers, while all the chambers are so low they are absurd. Did n't you notice it in your room?"

"Why — no; I don't think I did."

"Well, you will now."

"Perhaps so, since you have told me to," returned Mrs. Howland, a curious smile on her lips.

The dinner was well planned, well cooked, and well served, in Mrs. Howland's opinion, though to her niece it was none of the three. Kate's husband, the Honorable Eben Blake, proved to be a genial, distinguished-looking man who welcomed Mrs. Howland with the cordiality that he displayed toward anybody or anything connected in the most remote degree with his wife. It was evidently with sincere regrets that he made his apologies after dinner, and left the house with a plea of business.

"It 's always that way when I want him!" exclaimed Kate petulantly. "Then night after

night when I don't want him he'll stay at home and read and smoke."

"But you have friends — you go out," hazarded Mrs. Howland.

Mrs. Blake raised her eyebrows.

"Oh, of course! But, after all, what do calls and receptions amount to? You always meet the same people who say the same things, whether you go to see them or they come to see you."

Mrs. Howland laughed; then she said, softly,

"The old, old story, Kate, — the crumbs on the plates."

"What?" demanded the younger woman in frank amazement. There was a moment's pause during which she gazed blankly into her aunt's eyes. "Oh! — that?" she added, coloring painfully; then she uptilted her chin. "You are very much mistaken, auntie," she resumed with some dignity. "It is nothing of the sort. I am very happy — very happy, indeed!" — positively. "I have a good husband, a pretty home, more money than is good for me, and — well, everything," she finished a little breathlessly.

Again Mrs. Howland laughed, but her face grew almost instantly grave.

"And yet, my dear," she said gently, "scarcely one thing has been mentioned since I came that was quite right."

"Oh, Aunt Ellen, how can you say such a dreadful thing!"

"Listen," replied Mrs. Howland; "it's little bits of things that you don't think of. It has grown on you without your realizing it: the horses did n't both have stars; the house was n't on Commonwealth Avenue; the rooms are too high or too low studded; the roast was overdone; your husband could n't" —

"Oh, auntie, auntie, I beg of you!" — interrupted Kate hysterically.

"Are you convinced, then?"

Kate shook her head. "I can't, auntie — I can't believe it!" she cried. "It — it can't be like that always. There must have been special things to-day that plagued me. Auntie, I'm not such a — monster!"

"Hm-m; well — will you consent to an experiment to — er — find out?"

"Indeed I will!" returned Kate promptly.

"Very good! Every time I hear those little dissatisfied fault-findings, I am going to mention crumbs or plates or china. I think you'll understand. Is it a bargain?"

"It's a bargain," agreed Kate, and she smiled confidently.

The rest of the evening Mrs. Blake kept close guard over her tongue. Twice a "but" and once an "only" slipped out; but she bit her lips and completed her sentence in another way in each case, and if Mrs. Howland noticed, she made no sign.

It rained the next morning. Kate came into the dining-room with a frown.

"I'm so sorry, auntie," she sighed. "I'd planned a drive this morning. It always rains when I want to do something, but when I don't, it just shines and shines, week in and week out."

"Won't the rain wash the — plates?" asked Mrs. Howland in a low voice, as she passed her niece's chair.

"Wha-at?" demanded Mrs. Blake; then she flushed scarlet. "Weather does n't count," she finished flippantly.

"No? Oh!" smiled Mrs. Howland.

"Fine muffins, these!" spoke up Mr. Blake, a little later. "New cook — eh?"

"Yes," replied his wife. "But they 're graham. I 'd much rather have had corn-cake."

"There are not so many — crumbs to graham," observed Mrs. Howland musingly.

There was no reply. The man of the house looked slightly dazed. His wife bit her lip, and choked a little over her coffee. Through the rest of the meal Mrs. Blake confined herself almost exclusively to monosyllables, leaving the conversation to her husband and guest.

At ten the sky cleared, and Mrs. Blake ordered the horses.

"We can't drive far," she began discontentedly, "for I ordered an early luncheon as we have tickets for a concert this afternoon. I wanted to go away out beyond the Newtons, but now we'll have to take a little snippy one."

"Oh, I don't mind," rejoined her guest pleasantly. "Where one can't have the whole cake one must be satisfied with — crumbs."

"Why, I don't see" — began Kate aggressively; then she stopped, and nervously tapped her foot.

"Oh, how pretty that vine is!" cried Mrs. Howland suddenly. The silence was growing oppressive.

"It looks very well now, but you should see it in winter," retorted Kate. "Great, bare, snake-like things all over the — now, don't cudgel your brains to bring 'plates' or 'crumbs' into that!" she broke off with sudden sharpness.

"No, ma'am," answered Mrs. Howland demurely.

By night the guest, if not the hostess, was in a state of nervous tension that boded ill for sleep. The day had been one long succession of "crumbs" and "china plates" — conversationally. According to Kate, the roads had been muddy; the sun had been too bright; there had been chops when there should have been croquettes for luncheon; the concert seats were too far forward; the soprano had a thin voice, and the bass a faulty enunciation; at dinner the soup was insipid, and the dessert

a disappointment; afterwards, in the evening, callers had stayed too long.

Mrs. Howland was in her own room, on the point of preparing for bed, when there came a knock at her chamber door.

"Please, Aunt Ellen, may I come in?"

"Certainly, my dear," called Mrs. Howland, hastening across the room.

Kate stepped inside, closed the door, and placed her back against it.

"I'll give it up," she began, half laughing, half crying. "I never, never would have believed it! Don't ever say 'crumbs' or 'plates' to me again as long as you live — *please!* I believe I never can even *see* the things again with any peace or comfort. I am going to try — try — Oh, how I'm going to try! — but, auntie, I think it 's a hopeless case!" The next instant she had whisked the door open and had vanished out of sight.

"'Hopeless'?" Mrs. Howland was whispering to herself the next day, as she passed through the hall. "'Hopeless'? Oh, no, I think not." And she smiled as she heard her niece's voice in the drawing-room saying:

"High studded, Eben? — these rooms? Yes, perhaps; but, after all, it does n't matter so much, being a drawing-room — and one does get better air, you know!"

A Four-Footed Faith and a Two

ON Monday Rathburn took the dog far up the trail. Stub was no blue-ribbon, petted dog of records and pedigree; he was a vicious-looking little yellow cur of mixed ancestry and bad habits — that is, he had been all this when Rathburn found him six months before and championed his cause in a quarrel with a crowd of roughs in Mike Swaney's saloon. Since then he had developed into a well-behaved little beast with a pair of wistful eyes that looked unutterable love, and a tail that beat the ground, the floor, or the air in joyous welcome whenever Rathburn came in sight. He was part collie, sharp-nosed and prick-eared, and his undersized little body still bore the marks of the precarious existence that had been his before Rathburn had befriended him.

Rathburn had rescued the dog that day in

the saloon more to thwart the designs of Pete Mulligan, the head of the gang and an old enemy, than for any compassion for the dog itself; but after he had taken the little animal home he rather enjoyed the slavish devotion which — in the dog's mind — seemed evidently to be the only fit return for so great a service as had been done him. For some months, therefore, Rathburn petted the dog, fed him, taught him to "speak" and to "beg," and made of him an almost constant companion. At the end of that time, the novelty having worn thin, he was ready — as he expressed it to himself — to "call the whole thing off," and great was his disgust that the dog failed to see the affair in the same light.

For some time, Rathburn endured the plaintive whines, the questioning eyes, the frequent thrusts of a cold little nose against his hand; then he determined to end it all.

"Stub, come here!" he called sharply, his right hand seeking his pocket.

With a yelp of joy the dog leaped forward — not for days had his master voluntarily noticed him.

Rathburn raised his pistol and took careful aim. His eye was steady and his hand did not shake. Two feet away the dog had come to a sudden halt. Something in the eye or in the leveled weapon had stayed his feet. He whined, then barked, his eyes all the while wistfully demanding an explanation. Suddenly, his gaze still fixed on his master's face, he rose upright on his haunches and held before him two little dangling paws.

There was a silence, followed by a muttered oath, as the pistol dropped to the ground.

"Confound my babyishness!" snarled Rathburn, stooping and pocketing his weapon. "One would think I'd never seen a gun before!"

This was on Sunday. On Monday Rathburn took the dog far up the trail.

"Want a dog?" he said to the low-browed, unkempt man sitting at the door of a squat cabin.

"Well, I don't. I ain't buyin' dogs these days."

"Yer don't have ter buy this one," observed Rathburn meaningly.

The other glanced up with sharp eyes.

"Humph! Bite?" he snapped.

Rathburn shook his head.

"Sick of him," he returned laconically. "Like his room better'n his company."

"Humph!" grunted the other. Then to the dog: "Come here, sir, an' let's have a look at ye!"

Five minutes later Rathburn strode down the trail alone, while behind him, on the other side of the fast-shut cabin door, barked and scratched a frantic little yellow dog.

Tuesday night, when Rathburn came home, the first sound that greeted him was a joyous bark, as a quivering, eager little creature leaped upon him from out of the dark.

On Wednesday Stub trotted into town at Rathburn's heels, and all the way down the straggling street he looked neither to the right nor to the left, so fearful did he seem that the two great boots he was following should in some way slip from his sight. And yet, vigilant as he was, the door of Swaney's saloon got somehow between and left him on one side barking and whining and running like mad about the

room, while on the other his master stood jingling the two pieces of silver in his pocket — the price Mike Swaney had paid for his new dog.

Halfway up the mountain-side Rathburn was still chuckling, still jingling his coins.

"When a man pays money," he was saying aloud, as he squared his shoulders and looked across the valley at the setting sun, "when a man pays money he watches out. I reckon Stub has gone fer good, sure thing, this time!" And yet—long before dawn there came a whine and a gentle scratch at his cabin door; and although four times the dog was returned to his new owner, four times he escaped and nosed the long trail that led to the cabin on the mountain-side.

After Stub's fourth desertion the saloonkeeper refused to take him again, and for a week the dog lay unmolested in his old place in the sun outside the cabin door, or dozed before the fireplace at night. Then Rathburn bestirred himself and made one last effort, taking the dog quite over the mountain and leaving him tied to a tree.

At the end of thirty-six hours, Rathburn was congratulating himself; at the end of thirty-seven he was crying, "Down, sir — down!" to a joy-crazed little dog which had come leaping down the mountain-side with eighteen inches of rope dangling at his heels — a rope whose frayed and tattered end showed the marks of sharp little teeth.

Rathburn gave it up after that, and Stub stayed on. There was no petting, no trick-teaching; there were only sharp words and sometimes a kick or a cuff. Gradually the whines and barks gave way to the more silent appeal of wistful eyes, and Stub learned that life now was a thing of little food and less joy, and that existence was a thing of long motionless watchings of a master who would not understand.

Weeks passed and a cold wind swept down from the mountains. The line of snow crept nearer and nearer the clearing about the cabin, and the sun grew less warm. Rathburn came home each night with a deeper frown on his face, and a fiercer oath as he caught sight of the dog. Down at Swaney's the men knew that

Bill Rathburn was having a "streak o' poor luck"; the golden treasure he sought was proving elusive. Stub knew only that he must hide each night now when his master appeared.

As the days passed food became scarce in the cabin. It had been some time since Rathburn had gone to town for supplies. Then came the day when a great joy came into Stub's life — his master spoke to him. It was not the old fond greeting, to be sure. It was a command, and a sharp one; but in Stub's opinion it was a vast improvement on the snarling oaths or wordless glowerings which had been his portion for the past weeks, and he responded to it with every sense and muscle quiveringly alert.

And so it came about that Stub, in obedience to that sharp command, frequently scampered off with his master to spend long days in the foothills, or following the mountain streams. Sometimes it was a partridge, sometimes it was a squirrel, or a rabbit — whatever it was that fell a victim to Rathburn's gun, Stub learned very soon that it must be brought at once to the master and laid at his feet; and so proud

was he to be thus of use and consequence that he was well content if at the end of the day his master tossed him a discarded bone after the spoils had been cooked and the man's own appetite satisfied.

It was on one of the days when work, not hunting, filled the time, that Rathburn came home after a long day's labor to find Stub waiting for him with a dead rabbit. After that it came to be a common thing for the dog to trot off by himself in the morning; and the man fell more and more in the way of letting him go alone, as it left his own time the more free for the pursuit of that golden sprite who was ever promising success just ahead.

As for Stub — Stub was happy. He spent the long days in the foothills or on the mountain-side, and soon became expert in his hunting. He would trail for hours without giving tongue, and would patiently lie and wait for a glimpse of a venturesome woodchuck or squirrel. So devoted was he, so well trained, and so keenly alive was he to his responsibilities that, whether the day had been one of great or small success, he was always to be

found at night crouching before the cabin door on guard of something limp and motionless — something that a dozen hours before had been a throbbing, scurrying bit of life in the forest. To be sure, that "something" did not always have a food value commensurate with the labor and time Stub had spent to procure it; but to Stub evidently the unforgivable sin was to return with nothing, which fact may explain why Rathburn came home one night to find Stub on guard beside a small dead snake. Both man and dog went supperless that night — the man inside the cabin before a roaring fire; the dog outside in the cheerless dark before a fast-closed door whither his master had promptly consigned him.

Gradually as the days passed there came still another change in the life at the cabin. Rathburn's step became slow, and his cheeks sunken. Sometimes he did not leave home all day, but lay tossing from side to side on his bunk in the corner. At such times, if the result of Stub's hunt were eatable, the man would rouse himself enough to stir the fire and get supper; and always, after such a day at home,

Rathburn was astir the next morning at dawn and off in feverish haste for a long day's work to make up for the long day of idleness.

But there came a time when he could not do this — when each day found him stretched prone on his bunk or moving feebly about the room. Then came a night when Stub's bark at the door was unanswered. Again and again Stub demanded admittance only to be met with silence. The door, though unlatched, was swollen from recent rains, and it took five good minutes and all the strength of one small dog to push it open a narrow foot, and then there were only silence and a dying fire by way of greeting.

Stub dropped his burden on the floor and whined. He was particularly proud to-night; he had brought home a partridge — the first he had ever caught without the aid of his master's gun.

The figure on the bed did not move.

The dog picked up the bird he had dropped and walked toward his master. This time he laid his offering close to the bunk and barked.

The man stirred and groaned. For long min-

utes the dog stood motionless, watching; then he crept to the fire and almost into the hot ashes in his efforts to warm the blood in his shivering little legs.

In the morning the fire was quite out. Stub stretched his stiffened body and gazed about the room. Over on the bed the man did not stir nor speak. The dead bird lay untouched at his side. There was a whine, a bark, and a long minute of apparent indecision; then the dog pattered across the floor, wormed himself through the partly open door, and took the trail that led to the foothills.

Three times Stub brought to the fireless, silent cabin the result of his day's hunt and laid it at his master's side, and always there was only silence or a low groan to greet him.

On the third night it snowed — the first storm of the season. A keen wind swept down the mountain and played hide-and-seek with the cabin door, so that in the morning a long bar of high-piled snow lay across the cabin floor.

When the men from the village had ploughed their way through the snow and pushed open

the door, they stopped amazed upon the threshold, looking at one another with mingled alarm and pity; then one of them, conquering his reluctance, strode forward. He stooped for a moment over the prostrate form of the man before he turned and faced his companions.

"Boys, he's — gone," he said huskily; and in the silence that followed, four men bared their heads.

It was a dog's low whine that first stirred into action the man by the bunk. He looked down and his eyes grew luminous. He saw the fireless hearth, the drifted snow, and the half-dead dog keeping watchful guard over a pile of inert fur and feathers on the floor — a pile frozen stiff and mutely witnessing to a daily duty well performed.

"I reckon I'm needin' a dog," he said, as he stooped and patted Stub's head.

A Matter of System

AT the office of Hawkins & Hawkins, system was everything. Even the trotter-boy was reduced to an orbit that ignored craps and marbles, and the stenographer went about her work like a well-oiled bit of machinery. It is not strange, then, that Jasper Hawkins, senior member of the firm, was particularly incensed at the confusion that Christmas always brought to his home.

For years he bore — with such patience as he could muster — the attack of nervous prostration that regularly, on the 26th day of December, laid his wife upon a bed of invalidism; then, in the face of the unmistakable evidence that the malady would this year precede the holy day of peace and good-will, he burst his bonds of self-control and spoke his mind.

It was upon the morning of the 21st.

"Edith," he began, in what his young daughter called his "now mind" voice, "this thing has got to stop."

"What thing?"

"Christmas."

"*Jas*-per!" — it was as if she thought he had the power to sweep good-will itself from the earth. "Christmas — *stop!*"

"Yes. My dear, how did you spend yesterday?"

"I was — shopping."

"Exactly. And the day before? — and the day before that? — and before that? You need n't answer, for I know. And you were shopping for —" he paused expectantly.

"Presents." Something quite outside of herself had forced the answer.

"Exactly. Now, Edith, surely it need not take all your time for a month before Christmas to buy a few paltry presents, and all of it for two months afterward to get over buying them!"

"But, Jasper, they are n't few, and they're anything but paltry. Imagine giving Uncle Harold a *paltry* present!" retorted Edith, with some spirit.

The man waved an impatient hand.

"Very well, we will call them magnificent, then," he conceded. "But even in that case,

surely the countless stores full of beautiful and useful articles, and with a list properly tabulated, and a sufficiency of money —" An expressive gesture finished his sentence.

The woman shook her head.

"I know; it sounds easy," she sighed, "but it is n't. It's so hard to think up what to give, and after I've thought it up and bought it, I'm just sure I ought to have got the other thing."

"But you should have some system about it."

"Oh, I had — a list," she replied dispiritedly. "But I'm so — tired."

Jasper Hawkins suddenly squared his shoulders.

"How many names have you left now to buy presents for?" he demanded briskly.

"Three — Aunt Harriet, and Jimmy, and Uncle Harold. They always get left till the last. They're so — impossible."

"Impossible? Nonsense! — and I'll prove it to you, too. Give yourself no further concern, Edith, about Christmas, if *that* is all there is left to do — just consider it done."

"Do you mean — you'll get the presents for them?"

"Most certainly."

"But, Jasper, you know —"

An imperative gesture silenced her.

"My dear, I'm doing this to relieve *you*, and that means that you are not even to think of it again."

"Very well; er — thank you," sighed the woman; but her eyes were troubled.

Not so Jasper's; his eyes quite sparkled with anticipation as he left the house some minutes later.

On the way downtown he made his plans and arranged his list. He wished it were longer — that list. Three names were hardly sufficient to demonstrate his theories and display his ability. As for Aunt Harriet, Jimmy, and Uncle Harold being "impossible" — that was all nonsense, as he had said; and before his eyes rose a vision of the three: Aunt Harriet, a middle-aged spinster, poor, half-sick, and chronically discontented with the world; Jimmy, a white-faced lad who was always reading a book; and Uncle Harold, red-faced, red-headed, and — red-tempered. (Jasper smiled all to himself at this last thought.) "Red-tempered"

— that was good. He would tell Edith — but he would not tell others. Witticisms at the expense of a rich old bachelor uncle whose heir was a matter of his own choosing were best kept pretty much to one's self. Edith was right, however, in one thing, Jasper decided: Uncle Harold surely could not be given a "paltry" present. He must be given something fine, expensive, and desirable — something that one would like one's self. And immediately there popped into Jasper's mind the thought of a certain exquisitely carved meerschaum which he had seen in a window and which he had greatly coveted. As for Aunt Harriet and Jimmy — their case was too simple for even a second thought: to one he would give a pair of bed-slippers; to the other, a book.

Some minutes later Jasper Hawkins tucked into his pocketbook an oblong bit of paper on which had been neatly written: —

Presents to be bought for Christmas, 1908:

Aunt Harriet, spinster, 58(?) years old — Bed-slippers.

Uncle Harold, bachelor, 65 years old — Pipe.

Jimmy, boy, 12 years old — Book.

In the office of Hawkins & Hawkins that morning, the senior member of the firm found a man waiting for him. This man was the emissary of his mighty chief, and upon this chief rested the whole structure of a "deal" which was just then looming large on the horizon of Hawkins & Hawkins — and in which the oblong bit of paper in Jasper's pocketbook had no part.

Mrs. Jasper Hawkins greeted her husband with palpitating interest that evening.

"Well — what did you get?" she asked.

The man of business lifted his chin triumphantly.

"Not everything we asked for, to be sure," he began, "but we got more than we expected to, and — " He stopped abruptly. The expression on his wife's face had suddenly reminded him that by no possible chance could she know what he was talking about. "Er — what do you mean?" he demanded.

"Why, Jasper, there's only one thing I could mean — the presents, you know!"

A curious something clutched at Jasper's breath and held it for a moment suspended.

Then Jasper throttled the something, and raised his chin even higher.

"Time enough for that to-morrow," he retorted lightly. "I did n't promise to get them to-day, you know."

"But, Jasper, to-morrow 's the 22d!"

"And three whole days before Christmas."

"Yes, but they must be sent the 24th."

"And they'll *be* sent, my dear," declared Jasper, in a tone of voice that was a cold dismissal of the subject.

On the morning of the 22d, Jasper Hawkins told himself that he would not forget the presents this time. He decided, however, that there was no need for him to take the whole day to select a pipe, a book, and a pair of slippers. There would be quite time enough after luncheon. And he smiled to himself in a superior way as he thought of the dizzying rush and the early start that always marked his wife's shopping excursions. He was still smiling happily when he sallied forth at two o'clock that afternoon, leaving word at the office that he would return in an hour.

He decided to buy the meerschaum first,

and with unhesitating steps he sought the tobacco-store in whose window he had seen it. The pipe was gone, however, and there really was no other in the place that just suited him, though he spent fully half an hour trying to find one. He decided then to look elsewhere. He would try the department store in which he intended to buy the book and the slippers. It was better, anyway, that he should do all his shopping under one roof — it was more systematic.

The great clock in the department-store tower had just struck three when Jasper stalked through the swinging doors on the street floor. He had been detained. Window displays had allured him, and dawdling throngs of Christmas shoppers had forced his feet into a snail's pace. He drew now a sigh of relief. He had reached his destination; he would make short work of his purchases. And with a dignified stride he turned toward the nearest counter.

At once, however, he found himself caught in a swirl of humanity that swept him along like a useless chip and flung him against a counter much farther down the aisle. With

what dignity he could summon to his aid he righted himself and addressed the smiling girl behind it.

"I'm looking for pipes," he announced, severely. "Perhaps you can tell me where they are."

She shook her head.

"Ask him," she suggested, with a nod and a jerk of her thumb.

And Jasper, looking in the direction indicated, saw a frock-coated man standing like a rock where the streams of humanity broke and surged to the right and to the left. By some maneuvering, Jasper managed in time to confront this man.

"Pipes," he panted anxiously — he was reduced now to the single word.

"Annex; second floor. Elevator to your right."

"Thanks!" fervently breathed the senior member of the firm of Hawkins & Hawkins, muttering as he turned away, "Then they have got some system in this infernal bedlam!"

The crisp directions had sounded simple,

but they proved to be anything but simple to follow. Like a shuttlecock, Jasper was tossed from clerk to clerk, until by the time he reached his destination he was confused, breathless, and cross.

The pipes, however, were numerous and beautiful, and the girl behind the counter was both pretty and attentive; moreover, pipes did not happen to be popular that day, and the corner was a little paradise of quietness and rest. The man drew a long breath of relief and bent to his task.

In his mind was the one thought uppermost — he must select just such a pipe as he himself would like; and for long minutes he pondered whether this, that, or another would best please him. So absorbed was he, indeed, in this phase of the question, that he had made his selection and taken out his money, when the sickening truth came to him — Uncle Harold did not smoke.

To Jasper it seemed incredible that he had not thought of this before. But not until he pictured his purchase in his uncle's hand had he realized that the thing was not for himself,

after all, but for a man who not only did not smoke, but who abhorred the habit in others.

With a muttered something that the righteously indignant pretty girl could not hear, Jasper Hawkins thrust his money into his pocket and rushed blindly away from the pipe counter. Long minutes later in the street, he adjusted his tie, jerked his coat into place, straightened his hat, and looked at his watch.

It was four o'clock, and he must go back to the office before starting for home. There was still another whole day before him, he remembered, and, after all, it was a very simple matter to buy the book and the slippers, and then look around a little for something for Uncle Harold. In the morning he would doubtless light upon the very thing. And with this comforting thought he dismissed the subject and went back to the office.

Mrs. Hawkins did not question her husband that night about what he had bought. Something in his face stayed the words on her lips.

Jasper Hawkins went early to the office the

next morning, but it was fully eleven o'clock before he could begin his shopping. He told himself, however, that there was quite time enough for the little he had to do, and he stepped off very briskly in the direction of the department store he had left the night before. He had decided that he preferred this one to the intricacies of a new one; besides, he was very sure that there would not now be so many people in it.

Just here, however, Jasper met with a disappointment. Not only was every one there who had been there the day before, but most of them had brought friends, and in dismay Jasper clung to the post near the door while he tried to rally his courage for the plunge. In the distance the frock-coated man was still the rock where the stream foamed and broke; and after a long wait and a longer struggle Jasper stood once more before him.

"I want slippers — bed-slippers for women," he muttered.

"Fourth floor, front. Elevator to your left," declaimed the man. And Jasper quite glowed with awe at the thought of a brain so stu-

pendous that it could ticket and tell each shelf and counter in that vast domain of confusion.

Jasper himself had been swept to the right on the crest of a particularly aggressive wave formed by the determined shoulders of a huge fat woman who wished to go in that direction; so it was some time before he could stem the current and make an effort to reach the elevator on the other side of the store. It was then that he suddenly decided to grasp this opportunity for "looking about a little to find something for Uncle Harold" — and it was then that he was lost, for no longer had he compass, captain, or a port in view; but oarless and rudderless he drifted.

Then, indeed, did the department store, in all its allurements of glitter and show and competing attractions, burst on Jasper's eyes, benumbing his senses and overthrowing his judgment. For long minutes he hung entranced above a tray of jeweled side combs, and for other long minutes he critically weighed the charms of a spangled fan against those of one that was merely painted — before he suddenly awoke to the realization that he was looking

for something for Uncle Harold, and that Uncle Harold did not wear side combs, nor disport himself with gauze fans.

"Where do you keep things for men?" he demanded then, aggrievedly, of the demure-faced girl behind the counter; and it was while he was on the ensuing frantic search for "things for men" that he stumbled upon the book department.

"To be sure — a book for Jimmy," he muttered, and confidently approached a girl who already was trying to wait on three customers at once.

"I want a book for a boy," he observed; and was surprised that no one answered.

"I want a book for a boy," he urged, in a louder tone.

Still no one answered.

"I want a book — for — a — boy," he reiterated distinctly; and this time the girl flicked her ear as at the singing of an annoying insect.

"Juveniles three aisles over to your left," she snapped glibly; and after a puzzled pondering on her words, Jasper concluded that they were meant for him.

In the juvenile department, Jasper wondered why every one in the store had chosen that particular minute to come there and buy a book for a child. Everywhere were haste and confusion. Nowhere was there any one who paid the least attention to himself. At his right a pretty girl chatted fluently of this, that, and another "series"; and at his left a severe-faced woman with glasses discoursed on the great responsibility of selecting reading for the young, and uttered fearsome prophecies of the dire evil that was sure to result from indiscriminate buying.

Her words were not meant for Jasper's ears, but they reached them, nevertheless. The man shuddered and grew pale. With soft steps he slunk out of the book department. . . . To think that he — *he*, who knew nothing whatever about books for boys — had nearly bought one of the risky things for Jimmy! And to Jasper's perverted imagination it almost seemed that Jimmy, white-faced and sad-eyed, had already gone wrong — and through him.

Jasper looked at his watch then, and decided it was time for luncheon. After that

he could look around for something else for Jimmy.

It was six o'clock when Jasper, flushed, tired, and anxious, looked at his watch again, and took account of stock.

He had a string of beads and a pair of skates.

The skates, of course, were for Jimmy. He was pleased with those. It was a girl who had helped him in that decision — a very obliging girl who had found him in the toy department confusedly eyeing an array of flaxen-haired dolls, and who had gently asked him the age of the boy for whom he desired a present. He thought of that girl now with gratitude.

The string of beads did not so well please him. He was a little doubtful, anyway, how he happened to buy them. He had a dim recollection that they looked wonderfully pretty with the light bringing out sparkles of green and gold, and that the girl who tended them did not happen to have anything to do but to wait on him. So he had bought them. They were handsome beads, and not at all cheap. They would do for some one, he assured himself. And not until he had dropped them in

his pocket did it occur to him that he was buying presents for only a boy, a bachelor, and a middle-aged spinster. Manifestly a string of beads would not do for Jimmy or Uncle Harold, so they must do for Aunt Harriet. He had meant to buy bed-slippers for her, but, perhaps, after all, she would prefer beads. At all events, he had bought them, and they would have to go. And with that he dismissed the beads.

As yet he had nothing for Uncle Harold. There seemed to be nothing, really, that he could make up his mind to give. The more he searched, the more undecided he grew. The affair of the pipe had frightened him, and had sown distrust in his heart. He would have to buy something this evening, of course, for it must be sent to-morrow. He would telephone Edith that he could not be home for dinner — that business detained him; then he would eat a hasty luncheon and buy Uncle Harold's present. And with this decision Jasper wearily turned his steps toward a telephone booth.

Jasper Hawkins went home at ten o'clock. He still had nothing for Uncle Harold. The

stores had closed before he could find anything. But there was yet until noon the next day.

Mrs. Hawkins did not question her husband. In the morning she only reminded him timidly.

"You know those things must get off by twelve o'clock, Jasper."

"Oh, yes, they'll go all right," her husband had replied, in a particularly cheery voice. Jasper was not cheery, however, within. He was nervous and anxious. A terrible fear had clutched his heart: what if he could not — but then, he *must* find something, he enjoined himself. And with that he started downtown at once.

He did not go to the office this time, but sought the stores immediately. He found conditions now even worse than before. Every one seemed to have an Uncle Harold for whom was frenziedly being sought the unattainable. If at nine o'clock Jasper had been nervous, at ten he was terrified, and at eleven he was nearly frantic. All power of decision seemed to have left him, and he stumbled vaguely on and on, scarcely knowing what he was doing. It was then that his eye fell on a huge sign:

"Just the thing for Christmas! When in doubt, buy me!"

There was a crowd before the sign, but Jasper knew now how to use his elbows. Once at his goal he stared in amazement. Then the tension snapped, and he laughed outright — before him were half a dozen cages of waltzing mice.

For a long time the curious whirls and antics of the odd little creatures in their black-and-white coats held Jasper's gaze in a fascinated stare. Then the man, obeying an impulse that he scarcely understood himself, made his purchase, gave explicit directions where and when it was to be sent, and left the store. Then, and not until then, did Jasper Hawkins fully realize that to his Uncle Harold — the rich old man who must be petted and pampered, and never by any chance offended — he had sent as a Christmas present a cage of dancing mice!

That night Mrs. Hawkins fearlessly asked her questions, and as fearlessly her husband answered them. He had determined to assume a bold front. However grave might be

his own doubts and fears, he had resolved that she should not know of them.

"Presents? Of course! They went to-day with our love," he answered gayly.

"And what — did you send?"

"The simplest things in the world; a string of handsome beads to Aunt Harriet, a pair of skates to Jimmy, and a cage of the funniest little waltzing mice you ever saw, to Uncle Harold. You see it all resolves itself down to a mere matter of system," he went on; but at the real agony in his wife's face he stopped in dismay. "Why, Edith!"

"Jasper, you did n't — you *did n't* send *skates* to Jimmy!"

"But I did. Why not?"

"But, Jasper, he's — lame!"

Jasper fell back limply. All the bravado fled from his face.

"Edith, how could I — how could I — *forget* — a thing like that!" he groaned.

"And beads for Aunt Harriet! Why, Jasper, I never saw a bead on her neck! You know how poor she is, and how plain she dresses. I always give her useful, practical things!"

Jasper said nothing. He was still with Jimmy and the skates. He wished he had bought a book — a wicked book, if need be; anything would be better than those skates.

"And mice — *mice* for Uncle Harold!" wept Edith. "Why, Jasper, how could you? — dirty little beasts that Uncle Harold can only feed to his cat! And I had hoped so much from Uncle Harold. Oh, Jasper, Jasper, how could you!"

"I don't know," said Jasper dully, as he got up to leave the room.

To Jasper it was not a happy Christmas. There were those three letters of thanks to come; and he did not want to read them.

As it chanced they all came the same day, the 28th. They were addressed to Mrs. Hawkins, and naturally she read them first. When Jasper came home that night they lay waiting for him on his desk. He saw them, but he decided not to read them until after dinner. He felt that he needed all the fortification he could obtain. He hoped that his wife would not mention them, and yet he was conscious of a vague disappointment when, as time passed, she did not mention them.

Dinner over, further delay was impossible; and very slowly he picked up the letters. He singled out Aunt Harriet's first. Dimly he felt that this might be a sort of preparation for the wrath to follow.

Dear Niece and Nephew [he read — and he sat suddenly erect]. How ever in the world did you guess that it was beads that I wanted more than anything else in the world? And these are such handsome ones! Ever since beads and chains have been worn so much I have longed for one all my own; but I have tried to crush the feeling and hide it, for I feared it might be silly — and me so old and faded, and out-of-date! But I know now that it is n't, and that I need n't be ashamed of it any more, for, of course, you and Jasper would never give me anything silly! And thank you ever and ever so much!

With a slightly dazed expression Jasper Hawkins laid down Aunt Harriet's letter when he had finished it, and picked up the one from Uncle Harold. As he did so he glanced at his wife; but she was sewing and did not appear to be noticing him.

Well, well, children, you have done it this time! [read Jasper, with fearful eyes]. The little beasts came on Christmas morning, and never have I

[Jasper turned the page and relaxed suddenly] stopped laughing since, I believe! How in the world did you happen to think of a present so original, so cute, and so everlastingly entertaining? The whole house, and I might say the whole town, is in a fever over them, and there is already a constant stream of children past my window — you see, I've got the little devils where they can best be seen and appreciated!

There was more, much more, and all in the same strain; and again, as Jasper laid the letter down he glanced at his wife, only to find a demure, downcast gaze.

But one letter now remained, and in spite of what had gone before, Jasper picked up this with dread. Surely, nothing — nothing could reconcile Jimmy and those awful skates! He winced as he opened the letter and saw that Jimmy's mother had written — poor Jimmy's mother! how her heart must have ached! — and then he stared in unbelieving wonder at the words, and read them over and over, lest he had in some way misconstrued their meaning.

My dear sister and brother [Jimmy's mother had written], I wish you could have seen Jimmy when your beautiful skates arrived. He will

write you himself and thank you, but I know he can't half make you understand just what that present means to him, so I am going to write you myself and tell you what he said; then maybe you can realize a little what a great joy you have brought into his life.

And let me say right here that I myself have been blind all these years. I have n't understood. And what I want to know is, how did you find it out — what Jimmy wanted? How did you know? When I, his own mother, never guessed! Why, even when the skates came on Christmas Day, I was frightened and angry, because you had been so "thoughtless" as to send my poor lame boy *skates!* And then — I could hardly believe my own eyes and ears, for Jimmy, his face one flame of joy, was waving a skate in each hand. "Mother, mother!" he was shouting. "See, I've got a *boy* present, a real boy present — just as if I was — like other boys. I've always had books and puzzles and girl presents! Everybody's thought of *them* when they thought of *me!*" he cried, thumping the crutches at his side. "But this is a *real* present — Now I've got something to show, and to lend — something that *is* something!" And on and on he chattered, with me staring at him as if I thought he was out of his head.

But he was n't out of his head. He was happy — happier than I've ever seen him since he was hurt. And it still lasts. He shows those skates to

every one, and talks and talks about them, and has already made plans to let his dearest friends try them. Best of all, they have given him a new interest in life, and he is actually better. The doctor says at this rate he'll be using the skates himself some day!

And now, how can I thank you — *you* who have done this thing, who have been so wise beyond his mother? I can only thank and thank you, and send you my dearest love.

Your affectionate sister,

BERTHA

The senior member of the firm of Hawkins & Hawkins folded the letter very hurriedly and tucked it into its envelope. There was a mist in his eyes, and a lump in his throat — two most uncalled-for, unwelcome phenomena. With a determined effort he cleared his throat and began to speak.

"You see, Edith," he observed pompously, "your fears were quite groundless, after all. This Christmas shopping, if reduced to a system —" He paused suddenly. His wife had stopped her sewing and was looking straight into his eyes.

Angelus

TO Hephzibah the world was a place of weary days and unrestful nights, and life was a thing of dishes that were never quite washed and of bread that was never quite baked — leaving something always to be done.

The sun rose and the sun set, and Hephzibah came to envy the sun. To her mind, his work extended from the first level ray shot into her room in the morning to the last rose-flush at night; while as for herself, there were the supper dishes and the mending-basket yet waiting. To be sure, she knew, if she stopped to think, that her sunset must be a sunrise somewhere else; but Hephzibah never stopped to think; she would have said, had you asked her, that she had no time.

First there was the breakfast for Theron and the hired man in the chill gray dawn of each day; — if one were to wrest a living from the stones and sand of the hillside farm, one must be up and at work betimes. Then Harry, Tom,

and Nellie must be roused, dressed, fed, and made ready for the half-mile walk to the red schoolhouse at the cross-roads. After that the day was one blur of steam, dust, heat, and stifling fumes from the oven and the fat-kettle, broken always at regular intervals by meal-getting and chicken-feeding.

What mattered the blue of the heavens or the green of the earth outside? To Hephzibah the one was "sky" and the other "grass." What mattered the sheen of silver on the emerald velvet of the valley far below? Hephzibah would have told you that it was only the sun on Otter Creek down in Johnson's meadows.

As for the nights, even sleep brought little relief to Hephzibah; for her dreams were of hungry mouths that could not be filled, and of dirt-streaked floors that would not come clean.

Last summer a visitor had spent a week at the farm — Helen Raymond, Hephzibah's niece from New York; and now a letter had come from this same Helen Raymond, telling Hephzibah to look out for a package by express.

A package by express!

Hephzibah laid the letter down, left the dishes cooling in the pan, and went out into the open yard where she could look far down the road toward the village.

When had she received a package before? Even Christmas brought no fascinating boxes or mysterious bundles to her! It would be interesting to open it; and yet — it probably held a book which she would have no time to read, or a pretty waist which she would have no chance to wear.

Hephzibah turned and walked listlessly back to her kitchen and her dish-washing. Twelve hours later her unaccustomed lips were spelling out the words on a small white card which had come with a handsomely framed photograph:

The Angelus. Jean François Millet. 1859.

Hephzibah looked from the card to the picture, and from the picture back again to the card. Gradually an angry light took the place of the dazed wonder in her eyes. She turned fiercely to her husband.

"Theron, *why* did Helen send me that picture?" she demanded.

"Why, Hetty, I — I dunno," faltered the man, " 'nless she — she — wanted ter please ye."

"Please me! — *please me!*" scoffed Hephzibah. "Did she expect to please me with a thing like that? Look here, Theron, look!" she cried, snatching up the photograph and bringing it close to her husband's face. "Look at that woman and that man — they're us, Theron, — us, I tell you!"

"Oh, come, Hetty," remonstrated Theron; "they ain't jest the same, yer know. She did n't mean nothin' — Helen did n't."

"Did n't mean nothing!" repeated Hephzibah scornfully; "then why did n't she send something pretty? — something that showed up pretty things — not just fields and farmfolks! Why did n't she, Theron, — why did n't she?"

"Why, Hetty, don't! She — why, she —"

"I know," cut in the woman, a bright red flaming into her cheeks. " 'T was 'cause she thought that was all we could understand —

dirt, and old clothes, and folks that look like us! Don't we dig and dig like them? Ain't our hands twisted and old and —"

"Hetty — yer ain't yerself! Yer — "

"Yes, I am — I am! I'm always myself — there's never anything else I can be, Theron, — never!" And Hephzibah threw her apron over her head and ran from the room, crying bitterly.

"Well, by gum!" muttered the man, as he dropped heavily into the nearest chair.

For some days the picture stayed on the shelf over the kitchen sink, where it had been placed by Theron as the quickest means of its disposal. Hephzibah did not seem to notice it after that first day, and Theron was most willing to let the matter drop.

It must have been a week after the picture's arrival that the minister made his semi-yearly call.

"Oh, you have an Angelus! That's fine," he cried, appreciatively; — the minister always begged to stay in Hephzibah's kitchen, that room being much more to his mind than was the parlor, carefully guarded from sun and air.

" 'Fine'! — that thing!" laughed Hephzibah.

"Aye, that thing," returned the man, quick to detect the scorn in her voice; then, with an appeal to the only side of her nature he thought could be reached, he added: "Why, my dear woman, 'that thing,' as you call it, is a copy of a picture which in the original was sold only a few years ago for more than a hundred thousand dollars — a hundred and fifty, I think."

"Humph! *Who* could have bought it! That thing!" laughed Hephzibah again, and changed the subject. But she remembered, — she must have remembered; for, after the minister had gone, she took the picture from the shelf and carried it to the light of the window.

"A hundred and fifty thousand dollars," she murmured; "and to think what I'd do with that money!" For some minutes she studied the picture in silence, then she sighed: "Well, they do look natural like; but only think what a fool to pay a hundred and fifty thousand for a couple of farm-folks out in a field!"

And yet — it was not to the kitchen shelf

Hephzibah carried the picture that night, but to the parlor — the somber, sacred parlor. There she propped it up on the center-table among plush photograph-albums and crocheted mats — the dearest of Hephzibah's treasures.

Hephzibah could scarcely have explained it herself, but after the minister's call that day she fell into the way of going often into the parlor to look at her picture. At first its famous price graced it with a halo of gold; but in time this was forgotten, and the picture itself, with its silent, bowed figures, appealed to her with a power she could not understand.

"There 's a story to it — I know there 's a story to it!" she cried at last one day; and forthwith she hunted up an old lead-pencil stub and a bit of yellowed note-paper.

It was a long hour Hephzibah spent then, an hour of labored thinking and of careful guiding of cramped fingers along an unfamiliar way; yet the completed note, when it reached Helen Raymond's hands, was wonderfully short.

The return letter was long, and, though Hephzibah did not know it, represented hours

of research in bookstores and in libraries. It answered not only Hephzibah's questions, but attempted to respond to the longing and heart-hunger Miss Raymond was sure she detected between the lines of Hephzibah's note. Twelve hours after it was written, Hephzibah was on her knees before the picture.

"I know you now — I know you!" she whispered exultingly. "I know why you're real and true. Your master who painted you was like us once — like us, and like you! He knew what it was to dig and dig; he knew what it was to work and work until his back and his head and his feet and his hands ached and ached — he knew! And so he painted you!

"*She* says you're praying; that you've stopped your work and 'turned to higher things.' She says we all should have an Angelus in our lives each day. Good God! — as if she knew!" — Hephzibah was on her feet now, her hands to her head.

"An Angelus? — me?" continued the woman scornfully. "And where? The dish-pan? — the wash-tub? — the chicken-yard? A fine Angelus, that! And yet" — Hephzibah dropped to her

knees again — "you look so quiet, so peaceful, and, oh, so — rested!"

"For the land's sake, Hetty, what be you doin'? Have you gone clean crazy?" — It was Theron in the parlor doorway.

Hephzibah rose wearily to her feet. "Sometimes I think I have, Theron," she said.

"Well," — he hesitated, — "ain't it 'most — supper-time?"

"I s'pose 't is," she assented, listlessly, and dragged herself from the room.

It was not long after this that the picture disappeared from the parlor. Hephzibah had borne it very carefully to her room and hung it on the wall at the foot of her bed, where her eyes would open upon it the first thing every morning. Each day she talked to it, and each day it grew to be more and more a part of her very self. Not until the picture had been there a week, however, did she suddenly realize that it represented the twilight hour; then, like a flash of light, came her inspiration.

"It's at sunset — I'll go out at sunset! Now my Angelus will come to me," she cried softly. "I know it will!"

SOMETIMES SHE WOULD TURN TO THE RIGHT AND PAUSE AT THE BROW OF THE HILL

Then did the little hillside farmhouse see strange sights indeed. Each night, as the sun dropped behind the far-away hills, Hephzibah left her work and passed through the kitchen door, her face uplifted, and her eyes on the distant sky-line.

Sometimes she would turn to the left to the open field and stand there motionless, unconsciously falling into the reverent attitude now so familiar to her; sometimes she would turn to the right and pause at the brow of the hill, where the valley in all its panorama of loveliness lay before her; and sometimes she would walk straight ahead to the old tumble-down gate where she might face the west and watch the rose change to palest amber in the sky.

At first her eyes saw but grass, sky, and dull-brown earth, and her thoughts turned in bitterness to her unfinished tasks; but gradually the witchery of the summer night entered her soul and left room for little else. Strange faces, peeping in and out of the clouds, looked at her from the sky; and fantastic figures, clothed in the evening mist, swept up the valley to her feet. The grass assumed a deeper green, and

the trees stood out like sentinels along the hill-top behind the house. Even when she turned and went back to the kitchen, and took upon herself once more the accustomed tasks, her eyes still faintly glowed with the memory of what they had seen.

"It do beat all," said Theron a month later to Helen Raymond, who was again a visitor at the farm, — "it do beat all, Helen, what's come over yer aunt. She used ter be nervous-like, and fretted, an' things never went ter suit. Now she's calm, an' her eyes kind o' shine — 'specially when she comes in from one of them tramps of hers outdoors. She says it's her Angelus — if ye know what that is; but it strikes me as mighty queer — it do, Helen, it do!"

And Helen smiled, content.

The Apple of Her Eye

IT rained. It had rained all day. To Helen Raymond, spatting along the wet slipperiness of the drenched pavements, it seemed as if it had always rained, and always would rain.

Helen was tired, blue, and ashamed — ashamed because she was blue; blue because she was tired; and tired because — wearily her mind reviewed her day.

She had dragged herself out of bed at half-past five, but even then her simple toilet had been hastened to an untidy half completion by the querulous insistence of her mother's frequent "You know, Helen, — you *must* know how utterly impossible it is for me to lift my head until I've had my coffee! *Are n't* you nearly ready?" Mrs. Raymond had wakened earlier than usual that morning, and she could never endure to lie in bed when not asleep.

With one shoe unbuttoned and no collar on, Helen had prepared the coffee; then had come

the delicate task of getting the semi-invalid up and dressed, with hair smoothed to the desired satiny texture. The hair had refused to smooth, however, this morning; buttons had come off, too, and strings had perversely knotted until Helen's patience had almost snapped — almost, but not quite. In the end her own breakfast, and the tidying of herself and the little four-room flat, had degenerated into a breathless scramble broken by remorseful apologies to her mother, in response to which Mrs. Raymond only sighed:

"Oh, of course, it does n't matter; but you *know* how haste and confusion annoy me, and how bad it is for me!"

It had all resulted as Helen had feared that it would result — she was late; and tardiness at Henderson & Henderson's meant a sharp reprimand, and in time, a fine. Helen's place in the huge department store was behind a counter where spangled nets and embroidered chiffons were sold. It had seemed to Helen today that half the world must be giving a ball to which the other half was invited, so constant — in spite of the rain — were the calls

for her wares. The girl told herself bitterly that it would not be so unendurable were she handling anything but those filmy, glittering stuffs that spoke so loudly of youth and love and laughter. If it were only gray socks and kitchen kettles that she tended! At least she would be spared the sight of those merry, girlish faces, and the sound of those care-free, laughing voices. At least she would not have all day before her eyes the slender, gloved fingers which she knew were as fair and delicate as the fabrics they so ruthlessly tossed from side to side.

Annoyances at the counter had been more frequent to-day than usual, Helen thought. Perhaps the rain had made people cross. Whatever it was, the hurried woman had been more hurried, and the insolent woman more unbearable. There had been, too, an irritating repetition of the woman who was "just looking," and of her sister who "did n't know"; "was n't quite sure"; but "guessed that would n't do." Consequently Helen's list of sales had been short in spite of her incessant labor — and the list of sales was what Henderson & Henderson

looked at when a promotion was being considered.

And through it all, hour after hour, there had been the shimmer of the spangles, the light chatter of coming balls and weddings, the merry voices of care-free girls — the youth, and love, and laughter.

"Youth, and love, and laughter." Unconsciously Helen repeated the words aloud; then she smiled bitterly as she applied them to herself. Youth? — she was twenty-five. Love? — the grocer? the milkman? the floorwalker? oh, yes, and there was the postman. Laughter? — she could not remember when she had seen anything funny — really funny enough to laugh at.

Of all this Helen thought as she plodded wearily homeward; of this, and more. At home there would be supper to prepare, her mother to get to bed, and the noon dishes to clear away. Helen drew in her breath sharply as she thought of the dinner. She hoped that it had not been codfish-and-cream to-day. If it had, she must speak to Mrs. Mason. Codfish twice a week might do, but five times! (Mrs. Mason was the neighbor who, for a small sum each day,

brought Mrs. Raymond her dinner fully cooked.) There was a waist to iron and some mending to do. Helen remembered that. There would be time, however, for it all, she thought; that is, if it should not unfortunately be one of her mother's wakeful evenings when talking — and on one subject — was the only thing that would soothe her.

Helen sighed now. She was almost home, but involuntarily her speed slackened. She became suddenly more acutely aware of the dreary flapping of her wet skirts against her ankles, and of the swish of the water as it sucked itself into the hole at the heel of her left overshoe. The wind whistled through an alleyway in a startling swoop and nearly wrenched her umbrella from her half-numbed fingers, but still her step lagged. The rain slapped her face smartly as the umbrella careened, but even that did not spur her to haste. Unmistakably she dreaded to go home — and it was at this realization that Helen's shame deepened into a dull red on her cheeks; as if any girl, any right-hearted girl, should mind a mother's talk of her only son!

At the shabby door of the apartment house Helen half closed her umbrella and shook it fiercely. Then, as if freeing herself from something as obnoxious as was the rain, she threw back her head and shook that, too. A moment later, carefully carrying the dripping umbrella, she hurried up three flights of stairs and unlocked the door of the rear suite.

"My, but it sprinkles! Did you know it?" she cried cheerily to the little woman sitting by the west window.

" 'Sprinkles'! Helen, how can you speak like that when you *know* what a dreadful day it is!" fretted the woman. "But then, you don't know. You never do know. If *you* had to just sit here and stare and stare and stare at that rain all day, as I do, perhaps you would know."

"Perhaps," smiled Helen oddly — she was staring just then at the havoc that that same rain had wrought in what had been a fairly good hat.

Her mother's glance followed hers.

"Helen, that can't be — your hat!" cried the woman, aghast.

Helen smiled quizzically. "Do you know that's exactly what I was thinking myself, mother! It can't be — but it is."

"But it's ruined, utterly ruined!"

"Yes, ma'am."

"And you have n't any other that's really decent!"

"No, ma'am."

The woman sighed impatiently. "Helen, how can you answer like that when you *know* what it means to spoil that hat? Can't *anything* dampen your absurd high spirits?"

"'High spirits'!" breathed the girl. A quick flash leaped to her eyes. Her lips parted angrily; then, as suddenly, they snapped close shut. In another minute she had turned and left the room quietly.

Clothed in dry garments a little later, Helen set about the evening's tasks. At the first turn in the little room that served for both kitchen and dining-room she found the dinner dishes waiting to be cleared from the table — and there were unmistakable evidences of codfish-and-cream. As she expected, she had not long to wait.

"Helen," called a doleful voice from the sitting-room.

"Yes, mother."

"She brought codfish again to-day — five times this week; and you *know* how I dislike codfish!"

"Yes, I know, dear. I'm so sorry!"

"'Sorry'! But that does n't feed me. You *must* speak to her, Helen. I *can't* eat codfish like that. You must speak to-night when you take the dishes back."

"Very well, mother; but — well, you know we don't pay very much."

"Then pay more. I'm sure I should n't think you'd grudge me enough to eat, Helen."

"Mother! How can you say a thing like that!" Helen's voice shook. She paused a moment, a dish half-dried in her hands; but from the other room came only silence.

Supper that night was prepared with unusual care. There was hot corncake, too, — Mrs. Raymond liked hot corncake. It was a little late, it is true; Helen had not planned for the corncake at first — but there was the codfish. If the poor dear had had nothing but cod-

fish! . . . Helen opened a jar of the treasured peach preserves, too; indeed, the entire supper table from the courageous little fern in the middle to the "company china" cup at Mrs. Raymond's plate was a remorseful apology for that midday codfish. If Mrs. Raymond noticed this, she gave no sign. Without comment, she ate the corncake and the peach preserves, and drank her tea from the china cup; with Mrs. Raymond only the codfish of one's daily life merited comment.

It was at the supper table that Helen's mother brought out the letter.

"You don't ask, nor seem to care," she began with a curious air of injured triumph, "but I've got a letter from Herbert."

The younger woman flushed.

"Why, of course, I care," she retorted cheerily. "What does he say?"

"He wrote it several days ago. It got missent. But it's such a nice letter!"

"They always are."

"It asks particularly how I am, and says he's sorry I have to suffer so. *He* cares."

Only the swift red in Helen's cheeks

showed that the daughter understood the emphasis.

"Of course he cares," she answered smoothly.

"And he sent me a present, too — money!" Mrs. Raymond's usually fretful whine carried a ring of exultation.

Helen lifted her head eagerly.

"Money?"

"Yes. A new crisp dollar bill. He told me to get something pretty — some little trinket that I'd like."

"But, a dollar — only a dollar," murmured Helen. "Now you're needing a wrapper, but that —"

"A wrapper, indeed!" interrupted Mrs. Raymond in fine scorn. "A wrapper is n't a 'trinket' for me! I'd have wrappers anyway, of course. He said to buy something pretty; something I'd like. But then, I might have known. *You* never think I need anything but wrappers and — and codfish! I — I'm glad I've got one child that — that appreciates!" And Mrs. Raymond lifted her handkerchief to her eyes.

Across the table Helen caught her lower lip

between her teeth. For a moment she did not speak; then very gently she said: —

"Mother, you did n't quite mean that, I'm sure. You know very well that I — I'd dress you in silks and velvets, and feed you on strawberries and cream, if I could. It's only that — that — But never mind. Use the dollar as you please, dear. Is n't there something — some little thing you would like?"

Mrs. Raymond lowered her handkerchief. Her grieved eyes looked reproachfully across at her daughter.

"I'd thought of — a tie; a lace tie with pretty ends; a *nice* tie. You *know* how I like nice things!"

"Of course, you do; and you shall have it, too," cried Helen. "I'll bring some home tomorrow night for you to select from. Now that will be fine, won't it?"

The other drew a resigned sigh.

" 'Fine'! That's just like you, Helen. You never appreciate — never realize. Perhaps you do think it's 'fine' to stay mewed up at home here and have ties *brought* to you instead of

going out yourself to the store and buying them, like other women!"

"Oh, but just don't look at it that way," retorted Helen in a cheerful voice. "Just imagine you're a queen, or a president's wife, or a multi-millionairess who is sitting at home in state to do her shopping just because she wishes to avoid the vulgar crowds in the stores; eh, mother dear?"

"Mother dear" sniffed disdainfully.

"Really, Helen," she complained, "you are impossible. One would think you might have *some* sympathy, *some* consideration for my feelings! There's your brother, now. He's all sympathy. Look at his letter. Think of that dollar he sent me — just a little thing to give me happiness. And he's always doing such things. Did n't he remember how I loved peppermints, and give me a whole box at Christmas?"

Helen did not answer. As well she knew, she did not need to. Her mother, once started on this subject, asked only for a listener. Wearily the girl rose to her feet and began to clear the table.

"And it is n't as if he did n't have his hands full, just running over full with his business and all," continued Mrs. Raymond. "You *know* how successful he is, Helen. Now there's that club — what was it, president or treasurer that they made him? Anyhow, it was *something;* and that *shows* how popular he is. And you know every letter tells us of something new. I'm sure it is n't any wonder I'm proud of him; and relieved, too — I did hope some one of my children would amount to something; and I'm sure Herbert has."

There was a pause. Herbert 's sister was washing the dishes now, hurriedly, nervously. Herbert's mother watched her with dissatisfied eyes.

"Now there's you, Helen, and your music," she began again, after a long sigh. "You *know* how disappointed I was about that."

"Oh, but piano practice does n't help to sell goods across the counter," observed Helen dully. "At least, I never heard that it did."

" 'Sell goods,' " moaned the other. "Always something about selling goods! Helen, *can't* you get your mind for one moment off

that dreadful store, and think of something higher?"

"But it's the store that brings us in our bread and butter — and codfish," added Helen, half under her breath.

It was a foolish allusion, born of a much-tried spirit; and Helen regretted the words the moment they had left her lips.

"Yes, that's exactly what it brings — codfish," gloomed Mrs. Raymond. "I'm glad you at least realize that."

There was no reply. Helen was working faster now. Her cheeks were pink, and her hands trembled. As soon as possible she piled Mrs. Mason's dinner dishes neatly on the tray and hurried with them to the outer door of the suite.

"Now, Helen, don't stay," called her mother. "You *know* how much I'm alone, and I just simply can't go to bed yet. I'm not one bit sleepy."

"No, mother." The voice was calm, and the door shut quietly; but in the hall Helen paused at the head of the stairs, flushed and palpitating.

"I wonder — if it would do any good — if I should — throw them!" she choked hysteri-

cally, the tray raised high in her hands. Then with a little shamed sob she lowered the tray and hurried downstairs to the apartment below.

"It's only me, Mrs. Mason, with the dishes," she said a moment later, as her neighbor peered out into the hall in answer to the knock at the door. "I'm a little late to-night."

"Oh, to be sure, Miss Raymond; come in — come in. Why, child, what ails you?" cried the woman, as Helen stepped into the light.

"Ails me? Why, nothing," laughed the girl evasively. "Shall I put the things here?"

As she set the tray down and turned to go, the elder woman, by a sudden movement, confronted her.

"See here, Miss Helen, it ain't none o' my business, I know, but I've just got to speak. Your eyes are all teary, and your cheeks have got two red spots in 'em. You've been cryin'. I know you have. You're so thin I could just blow you over with a good big breath. And I know what's the matter. You're all wore out. You're doin' too much. No mortal woman can work both day and night!"

"But I don't — quite," stammered the girl "Besides, there is so much to be done. You know, mother — though she is n't very sick — can do but little for herself."

"Yes, I know she don't — seem to. But is n't there some one else that could help?"

The girl stirred restlessly. Her eyes sought for a means of escape.

"Why, no, of course not. There is n't any one," she murmured. "You are very kind, really, Mrs. Mason, but I must go — now."

The other did not move. She was standing directly before the hall door.

"There 's — your brother."

The girl lifted her head quickly. A look that was almost fear came into her eyes.

"Why, how did you know that I had — a brother?"

"Know it!" scoffed Mrs. Mason. "I have known your mother for a year — ever since she moved here; and as if a body could know *her* and not hear of *him!* He's the very apple of her eye. Why can't he — help? Would n't he, if he knew?"

"Why, Mrs. Mason, of course! He has —

he does," declared the girl quickly, the red deepening in her cheeks. "He — he sent her money only to-day."

"Yes, I know; she told me — of that." Mrs. Mason's voice was significant in its smoothness. "Your mother said she was going to get her — a tie."

"Yes, a tie," repeated Helen, with feverish lightness; "lace, you know. Mother does so love pretty things! Oh, and by the way," hurried on the girl breathlessly, "if you don't mind — about the dinners, you know. Mother does n't care for codfish-and-cream, and if you could just substitute something else, I'll pay more, of course! I'd expect to do that. I've been thinking for some time that you ought to have at least ten cents a day more — if you could manage — on that. And — thank you; if you *would* remember about — the codfish. and now I really must — go!" she finished. And before Mrs. Mason knew quite what had happened a flying figure had darted by her through the half-open doorway.

"Well, of all things! *Now* what have I said?" muttered the puzzled woman, staring after

her visitor. "Ten cents a day more, indeed! And where, for the land's sake, is the poor lamb going to find that?"

Long hours later in the Raymond flat, after the mending was done, the waist ironed, and the mother's querulous tongue had been silenced by sleep, the "poor lamb" sat down with her little account book and tried to discover just that — where she was going to find the extra ten cents a day to buy off Mrs. Mason's codfish.

It did not rain the next morning. The sun shone, indeed, as if it never had rained, and never would rain. In Helen Raymond's soul a deeper shame than ever sent the blue devils skulking into the farthermost corners — as if it were anything but a matter for the heartiest congratulations that one's mother had at least one child who had proved not to be a disappointment to her! And very blithely, to cheat the last one of the little indigo spirits, the girl resolutely uptilted her chin, and began her day.

It was not unlike the days that had gone before. There was the same apologetic rush in the morning, the same monotonous succession

of buyers and near-buyers at the counter, the same glitter and sparkle and chatter — the youth, and love, and laughter. Then at night came the surprise.

Helen Raymond went home to find the little flat dominated by a new presence, a presence so big and breezy that unconsciously she sniffed the air as if she were entering a pine grove instead of a stuffy, four-room city flat.

"Helen, he knows Herbert, my Herbert," announced Mrs. Raymond rapturously; and as she seemed to think no further introduction was necessary, the young man rose to his feet and added with a smile: —

"My name is Carroll — Jack Carroll; Miss Raymond, I suppose. Your brother — er — suggested that I call, as I was in the city."

"Of course you'd call," chirruped Mrs. Raymond. "As if we were n't always glad to see any friend of my boy's. Helen, why don't you say something? Why don't you welcome Mr. Carroll?"

"I have n't had much chance yet, mother," smiled the girl, in some embarrassment. "Perhaps I — I have n't caught my breath."

"Not that Mr. Carroll ought to mind, of course," resumed Mrs. Raymond plaintively. "And he won't when he knows you, and sees how moderate you are. You know Herbert is so quick," she added, turning to Herbert's friend.

"Is he?" murmured the man; and at the odd something in his voice Helen looked up quickly to find the stranger's eyes full upon her. "You see, I'm not sure, after all, that I do know Herbert," he continued lightly, still with that odd something in his voice. "Herbert's mother has been telling me lots of things — about Herbert."

"Yes; we've been having such a nice visit together," sighed Mrs. Raymond. "You see, *he* understands, Helen, — Mr. Carroll does."

Again Helen glanced up and met the stranger's eyes. She caught her breath sharply and looked away.

"Of course he understands," she cried, in a voice that was not quite steady. "If he knew you better, mother dear, he would know that there could n't be any nicer subject than

Herbert to talk about — Herbert and the fine things he has done!" There was no bitterness, no sarcasm, in tone or manner. There was only a frightened little pleading, a warding-off, as of some unknown, threatening danger. "Of course, Mr. Carroll understands," she finished; and this time she turned and looked straight into the stranger's eyes unswervingly.

"I understand," he nodded gravely.

And yet — it was not of Herbert that he talked during the next ten minutes. It was of Mrs. Raymond and her daughter, of their life at home and at the store. It was a gay ten minutes, for the man laughed at the whimsical playfulness with which Miss Raymond set off the pitiful little tale of the daily struggle for existence. If he detected the nervousness in the telling, he did not show it. He did frown once; but that was when Herbert's mother sighed apologetically: —

"You must n't mind all she says, Mr. Carroll. Helen never did seem to realize the serious side of life, nor what I suffer; but that is Helen's way."

"After all, it must be a way that helps

smooth things over some," he had retorted warmly.

And there the matter had ended — except in Helen's memory: there it bade fair to remain long, indeed.

At the end of the ten minutes, Herbert's friend rose to his feet and said that he must go. He added that he would come again, if he might; and to Miss Raymond he said very low — but very impressively — that she would see him soon, very soon. It was no surprise, therefore, to Helen, to encounter the big, tall fellow not twenty feet from her doorway when she started for the store the next morning.

His clean-cut face flushed painfully as he advanced; but the girl did not change color.

"Good-morning. I thought you'd do this," she began hurriedly. "We can talk as we walk. Now, tell me, please, quick. What is it about — Herbert?"

"Then you — know?"

"Not much; only suspect. I know everything is n't quite — right."

"But your mother does n't know — even that much?"

"No, no! *You* saw that, did n't you? I was so glad you did, and did n't speak! He is her pet, and she's so proud of him!"

"Yes, I know," nodded the man grimly. "I saw — that."

The girl lifted her chin.

"And mother has a right to be proud of him. Herbert is fine. It is only that — that —" She weakened perceptibly. "Was it — money?" she faltered.

"Y-yes." Carroll spoke with evident reluctance. His eyes looked down almost tenderly at the girl with the still bravely uptilted chin. "It — it is rather serious this time. He asked me to call and — and make it plain to you. I had told him I was coming up to town on business, and I promised. But — good Heavens, Miss Raymond, I — I can't tell you!"

"But you must. I'll have to know," cried the girl sharply. All the pride had fled now. "And you need n't fear. I know what it is. He wants money to settle debts. I've sent it before — once. That is it — that *is* it?"

"Yes, only it's — it's a particularly bad job this time," stammered the other. "You

see, it — it's club money — a little club among the boys, of which he is treasurer — and he sto — used part of the — funds."

The man choked over the wretched tale, and instinctively laid his hand on the girl's arm. She would faint or cry, of course, and he wondered what he could do. But there was no fainting, no crying. There was only the pitiful whitening of a set little face, and the tense question:

"How much — was it?"

Carroll sighed in relief.

"Miss Raymond, you're a — a brick — to take it like that," he cried brokenly. "I don't know another girl who — It was — well, a hundred dollars will cover it; but he's got to have it — to-morrow."

"I'll send it."

"But how — forgive me, Miss Raymond, but last night you were telling me that — that —" He flushed, and came to a helpless pause.

"How can I get it?" she supplied wearily. "We've a little in the bank — a very little laid by for a rainy day; but it will cover that. We never think of touching it, of course, for — for

ordinary things. But — *this*." She shuddered, and Carroll saw her shabbily gloved hand clinch spasmodically. "Mr. Carroll, how did he come to — do it?"

It was a short story, soon told — the usual story of a pleasure-loving, thoughtless youth, tempted beyond his strength. Carroll softened it where he could, and ended with: —

"I asked Bert to let me make it good, somehow, but he would n't, Miss Raymond. He — he just would n't!"

"Of course he would n't," exclaimed the girl sharply. Then, in a softer voice: "Thank you, just the same. But, don't you see? 'T would have done no good. I'd have had to pay you. . . . No, no, don't say any more, please," she begged, in answer to the quick words that leaped to his lips. "You have been kind — very kind. Now, just one kindness more, if you will," she hurried on. "Come to-night. I must leave you now — it's the store, just around the corner. But to-night I'll have the money. It's in my name, and I can get it without mother's — knowing. You understand? Without — mother's — *knowing*."

"I understand," he nodded gravely, as he wrung her hand and turned chokingly away.

When Helen reached home that night she found the little flat dominated once again by the big, breezy presence of Herbert's friend.

"I've been telling him more about Herbert," Mrs. Raymond began joyously, as soon as Helen entered the room. "I've been telling him about his letters to me, and the peppermints and the lace tie, you know, and how *good* Herbert is to me. We've had such a nice visit!"

"Have you? I'm so glad!" returned Helen, a little unsteadily; and only the man knew the meaning of the quick look of relieved gratitude that came to her face.

At the door some minutes later, Carroll found a small packet thrust into his fingers. He caught both the hand and the packet in a firm clasp.

"You're true blue, little girl," he breathed tremulously, "and I'm going to keep tabs on Bert after this. I'll *make* him keep straight for her — and for *you*. He's only a bit weak, after all. And you'll see me again soon — very

soon," he finished, as he crushed her hand in a grip that hurt. Then he turned and stumbled away, as if his eyes did not see quite clearly.

"Now, was n't he nice?" murmured Mrs. Raymond, as the girl closed the hall door. "And — did n't he say that he'd call again sometime?"

"Yes, mother."

"Well, I'm sure, I hope he will. He is n't Herbert, of course, but he *knows* Herbert."

"He — does, mother." There was a little break in Helen's voice, but Mrs. Raymond did not notice it.

"Dearie me! Well, he's gone now, and I *am* hungry. My dinner did n't seem to please, somehow."

"Why, mother, it was n't — codfish; was it?"

"N-no. It was chicken. But then, like enough it *will* be codfish to-morrow."

Helen Raymond dreamed that night, and she dreamed of love, and youth, and laughter. But it was not the shimmer of spangled tulle nor the chatter of merry girls that called it forth. It was the look in a pair of steadfast blue eyes, and the grip of a strong man's hand.

A Mushroom of Collingsville

THERE were three men in the hotel office that Monday evening: Jared Parker, the proprietor; Seth Wilber, town authority on all things past and present; and John Fletcher, known in Collingsville as "The Squire"—possibly because of his smattering of Blackstone; probably because of his silk hat and five-thousand-dollar bank account. Each of the three men eyed with unabashed curiosity the stranger in the doorway.

"Good-evening, gentlemen," began a deprecatory voice. "I — er — this is the hotel?"

In a trice Jared Parker was behind the short counter.

"Certainly, sir. Room, sir?" he said suavely, pushing an open book and a pen halfway across the counter.

"H'm, yes, I — I suppose so," murmured the stranger, as he hesitatingly crossed the floor. "H'm; one must sleep, you know," he added, as he examined the point of the pen.

"Certainly, sir, certainly," agreed Jared, whose face was somewhat twisted in his endeavors to smile on the prospective guest and frown at the two men winking and gesticulating over by the stove.

"H'm," murmured the stranger a third time, as he signed his name with painstaking care. "There, that's settled! Now where shall I find Professor Marvin, please?"

"Professor Marvin!" repeated Jared stupidly.

"Yes; Professor George Marvin," bowed the stranger.

"Why, there *ain't* no Professor Marvin, that I know of."

"Mebbe he means old Marvin's son," interposed Seth Wilber with a chuckle.

The stranger turned inquiringly.

"His name's 'George,' all right," continued Seth, with another chuckle, "but I never heard of his professin' anythin' — 'nless 't was laziness."

The stranger's face showed a puzzled frown.

"Oh — but — I mean the man who discovered that ants and —"

"Good gorry!" interrupted Seth, with a groan. "If it's anythin' about bugs an' snakes, he's yer man! Ain't he?" he added, turning to his friends for confirmation.

Jared nodded, and Squire Fletcher cleared his throat.

"He's done nothing but play with bugs ever since he came into the world," said the Squire ponderously. "A most unfortunate case of an utterly worthless son born to honest, hard-working parents. He'll bring up in the poor-house yet — or in a worse place. Only think of it — a grown man spending his time flat on his stomach in the woods counting ants' legs and bugs' eyes!"

"Oh, but —" The stranger stopped. The hotel-keeper had the floor.

"It began when he wa'n't more'n a baby. He pestered the life out of his mother bringing snakes into the sittin'-room, and carrying worms in his pockets. The poor woman was 'most mortified to death about it. Why, once when the parson was there, George used his hat to catch butterflies with — smashed it, too."

"Humph!" snapped the Squire. "The little beast filled one of my overshoes once, to make a swimming-tank for his dirty little fish."

"They could n't do nothin' with him," chimed in Seth Wilber. "An' when he was older, 't was worse. If his father set him ter hoein' pertaters, the little scamp would be found h'istin' up old rocks an' boards ter see the critters under 'em crawl."

"Yes, but —" Again the stranger was silenced.

"And in school he did n't care nothing about 'rithmetic nor jography," interrupted Jared. "He was forever scarin' the teacher into fits bringin' in spiders an' caterpillars, an' asking questions about 'em."

"Gorry! I guess ye can't tell me no news about George Marvin's schoolin'," snarled Seth Wilber — "me, that's got a son Tim what was in the same class with him. Why, once the teacher set 'em in the same seat; but Tim could n't stand that — what with the worms an' spiders — an' he kicked so hard the teacher swapped 'round."

"Yes; well — er — extraordinary, extraor-

dinary — very! — so it is," murmured the stranger, backing toward the door. The next moment he was out on the street asking the first person he met for the way to George Marvin's.

On Tuesday night a second stranger stopped at the hotel and asked where he could find Professor Marvin. Jared, Seth, and Squire Fletcher were there as before; but this time their derisive stories — such as they managed to tell — fell on deaf ears. The stranger signed his name with a flourish, engaged his room, laughed good-naturedly at the three men — and left them still talking.

On Wednesday two more strangers arrived, and on Thursday, another one. All, with varying manner but unvarying promptitude, called for Professor George Marvin.

Jared, Seth, and the Squire were dumfounded. Their mystification culminated in one grand chorus of amazement when, on Friday, the Squire came to the hotel hugging under his arm a daily newspaper.

"Just listen to this!" he blurted out, banging his paper down on the desk and spreading

it open with shaking hands. As he read, he ran his finger down the column, singling out a phrase here and there, and stumbling a little over unfamiliar words.

The recent ento-mo-logical discoveries of Professor George Marvin have set the scientific world in a flurry. . . . Professor Marvin is now unanimously conceded to be the greatest entomologist living. He knows his Hex-a-poda and Myri-a-poda as the most of us know our alphabet. . . . The humble home of the learned man has become a Mecca, toward which both great and small of the scientific world are bending eager steps. . . . The career of Marvin reads like a romance, and he has fought his way to his present enviable position by sheer grit, and ability, having had to combat with all the narrow criticism and misconceptions usual in the case of a progressive thinker in a small town. Indeed, it is said that even now his native village fails to recognize the honor that is hers.

"Jehoshaphat!" exclaimed Seth Wilber faintly.

Fletcher folded the paper and brought his fist down hard upon it.

"There 's more — a heap more," he cried excitedly.

"But how — what —" stammered Jared, whose wits were slow on untrodden paths.

"It 's old Marvin's son — don't you see?" interrupted Squire Fletcher impatiently. "He 's big! — famous!"

"'Famous!' What for?"

"Zounds, man! — did n't you hear?" snarled the Squire. "He 's a famous entomologist. It 's his bugs and spiders."

"Gosh!" ejaculated Jared, his hand seeking the bald spot on the back of his head. "Who'd ever have thought it? Gorry! Let's have a look at it." And he opened the paper and peered at the print with near-sighted eyes.

It was on Monday, three days later, that Jared, Seth, and the Squire were once more accosted in the hotel office by a man they did not know.

"Good-evening, gentlemen, I —"

"You don't even have to say it," cut in Jared, with a flourish of both hands. "We know why you're here without your telling."

"An' you've come ter the right place, sir — the right place," declared Seth Wilber, pompously. "What Professor Marvin don't know about bugs an' spiders ain't wuth knowin'. I

tell ye, sir, he's the biggest entymollygist that there is ter be found."

"That he is," affirmed the Squire, with an indulgently superior smile toward Wilber — "the very greatest *entomologist* living," he corrected carefully. "And no wonder, sir; he's studied bugs from babyhood. *I've known him all his life — all his life, sir*, and I always said he'd make his mark in the world."

"Oh, but —" began the stranger.

" 'Member when he took the parson's hat to catch butterflies in?" chuckled Jared, speaking to the Squire, but throwing furtive glances toward the stranger to make sure of his attention. "Gorry — but he was a cute one! Wish 't had been my hat. I'd 'a' had it framed an' labeled, an' hung up on the wall there."

"Yes, I remember," nodded the Squire; then he added with a complacent smile: "The mischievous little lad used my overshoe for a fishpond once — I have that overshoe yet."

"Have ye now?" asked Seth Wilber enviously. "I want ter know! Well, anyhow, my Tim, he went ter school with him, an' set in the same seat," continued Seth, turning toward

the stranger. "Tim's got an old writin'-book with one leaf all sp'iled 'cause one of young Marvin's spiders got into the inkwell an' then did a cake-walk across the page. Tim, he got a lickin' fur it then, but he says he would n't give up that page now fur forty lickin's."

The stranger shifted from one foot to the other.

"Yes, yes," he began, "but —"

"You'd oughter seen him when old Marvin used ter send him out to hoe pertaters," cut in Jared gleefully. "Gorry! — young as he was, he was all bugs then. He was smart enough to know that there was lots of curious critters under sticks an' stones that had laid still for a long time. I tell yer, there wa'n't much that got away from his bright eyes — except the pertaters! — he did n't bother them none."

A prolonged chuckle and a loud laugh greeted this sally. In the pause that followed the stranger cleared his throat determinedly.

"See here, gentlemen," he began pompously, with more than a shade of irritation in his voice. "*Will* you allow me to speak? And *will* you inform me what all this is about?"

"About? Why, it's about Professor George Marvin, to be sure," rejoined Squire Fletcher. "Pray, what else should it be about?"

"I guess you know what it's about all right, stranger," chuckled Seth Wilber, with a shrewd wink. "You can't fool us. Mebbe you're one o' them fellers what thinks we don't know enough ter 'preciate a big man when we've got him. No, sir-ree! We ain't that kind. Come, ye need n't play off no longer. We know why you're here, an' we're glad ter see ye, an' we're proud ter show ye the way ter our Professor's. Come on — 't ain't fur."

The stranger drew back. His face grew red, then purple.

"I should like to know," he sputtered thickly, "I should like to know if you really think that I — I have come 'way up here to see this old bug man. Why, man alive, I never even heard of him!"

"What!" ejaculated three disbelieving voices, their owners too dumfounded to take exceptions to the sneer in tone and words. "Zounds, man! — what did you come for, then?" demanded the Squire.

The stranger raised his chin.

"See here, who do you think I am?" he demanded pompously, as he squared himself before them in all his glory of checkered trousers, tall hat, and flaunting watch-chain. "Who do you think I am? I am Theophilus Augustus Smythe, sir, advance agent and head manager of the Kalamazoo None-Like-It Salve Company. I came, sir, to make arrangements for their arrival to-morrow morning. They show in this town to-morrow night. Now perhaps you understand, sir, that my business is rather more important than hunting up any old bug man that ever lived!" And he strode to the desk and picked up the pen.

For a moment there was absolute silence; then Seth Wilber spoke.

"Well, by ginger! — you — you 'd oughter have come ter see the Professor, anyhow," he muttered, weakly, as he fell back in his chair. "Say, Squire, 'member when Marvin —"

Over at the desk Theophilus Augustus Smythe crossed his *t* with so violent an energy that the pen sputtered and made two blots.

That Angel Boy

I AM so glad you consented to stay over until Monday, auntie, for now you can hear our famous boy choir," Ethel had said at the breakfast table that Sunday morning.

"Humph! I've heard of 'em," Ann Wetherby had returned crisply, "but I never took much stock in 'em. A choir — made o' boys — just as if music could come from yellin', hootin' boys!"

An hour later at St. Mark's, the softly swelling music of the organ was sending curious little thrills tingling to Miss Wetherby's finger tips. The voluntary had become a mere whisper when she noticed that the great doors near her were swinging outward. The music ceased, and there was a moment's breathless hush — then faintly in the distance sounded the first sweet notes of the processional.

Ethel stirred slightly and threw a meaning glance at her aunt. The woman met the look unflinchingly.

"Them ain't no boys!" she whispered tartly.

Nearer and nearer swelled the chorus until the leaders reached the open doors. Miss Wetherby gave one look at the white-robed singers, then she reached over and clutched Ethel's fingers.

"They be! — and in their nighties, too!" she added in a horrified whisper.

One of the boys had a solo in the anthem that morning, and as the clear, pure soprano rose higher and higher, Miss Wetherby gazed in undisguised awe at the young singer. She noted the soulful eyes uplifted devoutly, and the broad forehead framed in clustering brown curls. To Miss Wetherby it was the face of an angel; and as the glorious voice rose and swelled and died away in exquisite melody, two big tears rolled down her cheeks and splashed on the shining, black silk gown.

At dinner that day Miss Wetherby learned that the soloist was "Bobby Sawyer." She also learned that he was one of Ethel's "fresh-air" mission children, and that, as yet, there was no place for him to go for a vacation.

"That angel child with the heavenly voice

— and no one to take him in?" Miss Wetherby bethought herself of her own airy rooms and flowering meadows, and snapped her lips together with sudden determination.

"I'll take him!" she announced tersely, and went home the next day to prepare for her expected guest.

Early in the morning of the first Monday in July, Miss Wetherby added the finishing touches to the dainty white bedroom upstairs.

"Dear little soul — I hope he'll like it!" she murmured, giving a loving pat to the spotless, beruffled pillow shams; then her approving eyes fell upon the "Morning Prayer" hanging at the foot of the bed. "There! them sweet little cherubs sayin' their prayers is jest the thing fur the little saint to see when he first wakes ev'ry mornin'. Little angel!" she finished softly.

On the table in the corner were hymn books, the great red-and-gold family Bible, and a "Baxter's Saint's Rest" — the only reading matter suited to Miss Wetherby's conception of the mind behind those soulful orbs upraised in devout adoration.

Just before Ann started for the station Tommy Green came over to leave his pet dog, Rover, for Miss Wetherby's "fresh-air" boy to play with.

"Now, Thomas Green," remonstrated Ann severely, "you can take that dirty dog right home. I won't have him around. Besides, Robert Sawyer ain't the kind of a boy you be. He don't care fur sech things — I know he don't."

Half an hour later, Ann Wetherby, her heart thumping loudly against her ribs, anxiously scanned the passengers as they alighted at Slocumville Station. There were not many— an old man, two girls, three or four women, and a small, dirty boy with a dirtier dog and a brown paper parcel in his arms.

He had not come!

Miss Wetherby held her breath and looked furtively at the small boy. There was nothing familiar in *his* appearance, she was thankful to say! He must be another one for somebody else. Still, perhaps he might know something about her own angel boy — she would ask.

Ann advanced warily, with a disapproving eye on the dog.

"Little boy, can you tell me why Robert Sawyer did n't come?" she asked severely.

The result of her cautious question disconcerted her not a little. The boy dropped the dog and bundle to the platform, threw his hat in the air, and capered about in wild glee.

"Hi, there, Bones! We're all right! Golly — but I thought we was side-tracked, fur sure!"

Miss Wetherby sank in limp dismay to a box of freight near by — the bared head disclosed the clustering brown curls and broad forehead, and the eyes uplifted to the whirling hat completed the tell-tale picture.

The urchin caught the hat deftly on the back of his head, and pranced up to Ann with his hands in his pockets.

"Gee-whiz! marm — but I thought you'd flunked fur sure. I reckoned me an' Bones was barkin' up the wrong tree this time. It looked as if we'd come to a jumpin'-off place, an' you'd given us the slip. I'm Bob, myself, ye see, an' I've come all right!"

"Are you Robert Sawyer?" she gasped.

"Jest ye hear that, Bones!" laughed the boy shrilly, capering round and round the small dog again. "I's 'Robert' now — do ye hear?" Then he whirled back to his position in front of Miss Wetherby, and made a low bow. "Robert Sawyer, at yer service," he announced in mock pomposity. "Oh, I say," he added with a quick change of position, "yer 'd better call me 'Bob'; I ain't uster nothin' else. I'd fly off the handle quicker 'n no time, puttin' on airs like that."

Miss Wetherby's back straightened. She made a desperate attempt to regain her usual stern self-possession.

"I shall call ye 'Robert,' boy. I don't like — er — that other name."

There was a prolonged stare and a low whistle from the boy. Then he turned to pick up his bundle.

"Come on, Bones, stir yer stumps; lively, now! This 'ere lady 's a-goin' ter take us ter her shebang ter stay mos' two weeks. Gee-whiz! Bones, ain't this great!" And with one bound he was off the platform and turning a series of somersaults on the soft grass followed

by the skinny, mangy dog which was barking itself nearly wild with joy.

Ann Wetherby gazed at the revolving mass of heads and legs of boy and dog in mute despair, then she rose to her feet and started down the street.

"You c'n foller me," she said sternly, without turning her head toward the culprits on the grass.

The boy came upright instantly.

"Do ye stump it, marm?"

"What?" she demanded, stopping short in her stupefaction.

"Do ye stump it — hoof it — foot it, I mean," he enumerated quickly, in a praiseworthy attempt to bring his vocabulary to the point where it touched hers.

"Oh — yes; 't ain't fur," vouchsafed Ann feebly.

Bobby trotted alongside of Miss Wetherby, meekly followed by the dog. Soon the boy gave his trousers an awkward hitch, and glanced sideways up at the woman.

"Oh, I say, marm, I think it's bully of yer ter let me an' Bones come," he began sheep-

ishly. "It looked 's if our case 'd hang fire till the crack o' doom; there wa'n't no one ter have us. When Miss Ethel, she told me her aunt 'd take us, it jest struck me all of a heap. I tell ye, me an' Bones made tracks fur Slocumville 'bout 's soon as they 'd let us."

"I hain't no doubt of it!" retorted Ann, looking back hopelessly at the dog.

"Ye see," continued the boy confidentially, "there ain't ev'ry one what likes boys, an' — hi, there! — go it, Bones!" he suddenly shrieked, and scampered wildly after the dog which had dashed into the bushes by the side of the road.

Ann did not see her young charge again until she had been home half an hour. He came in at the gate, then, cheerfully smiling, the dog at his heels.

"Jiminy Christmas!" he exclaimed, "I begun ter think I'd lost ye, but I remembered yer last name was the same's Miss Ethel's, an' a boy — Tommy Green, around the corner — he told me where ye lived. And, oh, I say, me an' Bones are a-goin' off with him an' Rover after I've had somethin' ter eat — *'t is* mos' grub time, ain't it?" he added anxiously.

Ann sighed in a discouraged way.

"Yes, I s'pose 't is. I left some beans a-bakin', and dinner'll be ready pretty quick. You can come upstairs with me, Robert, an' I'll show ye where yer goin' ter sleep," she finished, with a sinking heart, as she thought of those ruffled pillow shams.

Bobby followed Miss Wetherby into the dainty chamber. He gave one look, and puckered up his lips into a long, low whistle.

"Well, I'll be flabbergasted! Oh, I say, now, ye don't expect me ter stay in all this fuss an' fixin's!" he exclaimed ruefully.

"It — it is the room I calculated fur ye," said Ann, with almost a choke in her voice.

The boy looked up quickly and something rose within him that he did not quite understand.

"Oh, well, ye know, it's slick as a whistle an' all that, but I ain't uster havin' it laid on so thick. I ain't no great shakes, ye know, but I'll walk the chalk all right this time. Golly! Ain't it squashy, though!" he exclaimed, as with a run and a skip he landed straight in the middle of the puffy bed.

With one agitated hand Miss Wetherby rescued her pillow shams, and with the other, forcibly removed the dog which had lost no time in following his master into the feathery nest. Then she abruptly left the room; she could not trust herself to speak.

Miss Wetherby did not see much of her guest that afternoon; he went away immediately after dinner and did not return until supper time. Then he was so completely tired out that he had but two words in reply to Miss Wetherby's question.

"Did ye have a good time?" she asked wistfully.

"You bet!"

After supper he went at once to his room; but it was not until Miss Wetherby ceased to hear the patter of his feet on the floor above that she leaned back in her chair with a sigh of relief.

When Ann went upstairs to make the bed that Tuesday morning, the sight that met her eyes struck terror to her heart. The bedclothes were scattered in wild confusion half over the room. The washbowl, with two long singing-

books across it, she discovered to her horror, was serving as a prison for a small green snake. The Bible and the remaining hymn books, topped by "Baxter's Saints' Rest," lay in a suspicious-looking pile on the floor. Under these Miss Wetherby did not look. After her experience with the snake and the washbowl, her nerves were not strong enough. She recoiled in dismay, also, from the sight of two yellow, paper-covered books on the table, flaunting shamelessly the titles: "Jack; the Pirate of Red Island," and "Haunted by a Headless Ghost."

She made the bed as rapidly as possible, with many a backward glance at the book-covered washbowl, then she went downstairs and shook and brushed herself with little nervous shudders.

Ann Wetherby never forgot that Fourth of July, nor, for that matter, the days that immediately followed. She went about with both ears stuffed with cotton, and eyes that were ever on the alert for all manner of creeping, crawling things in which Bobby's soul delighted.

The boy, reinforced by the children of the

entire neighborhood, held a circus in Miss Wetherby's wood-shed, and instituted a Wild Indian Camp in her attic. The poor woman was quite powerless, and remonstrated all in vain. The boy was so cheerfully good-tempered under her sharpest words that the victory was easily his.

But on Saturday when Miss Wetherby, returning from a neighbor's, found two cats, four dogs, and two toads tied to her parlor chairs, together with three cages containing respectively a canary, a parrot, and a squirrel (collected from obliging households), she rebelled in earnest and summoned Bobby to her side.

"Robert, I've stood all I'm a-goin' ter. You've got to go home Monday. Do you hear?"

"Oh, come off, Miss Wetherby, 't ain't only a menag'ry, an' you don't use the room none."

Miss Wetherby's mouth worked convulsively.

"Robert!" she gasped, as soon as she could find her voice, "I never, never heard of such dreadful goin's-on! You certainly can't stay here no longer," she continued sternly, resolutely trying to combat the fatal weakness that

always overcame her when the boy lifted those soulful eyes to her face. "Now take them horrid critters out of the parlor this minute. You go home Monday — now mind what I say!"

An hour later, Miss Wetherby had a caller. It was the chorister of her church choir. The man sat down gingerly on one of the slippery haircloth chairs, and proceeded at once to state his business.

"I understand, Miss Wetherby, that you have an — er — young singer with you."

Miss Wetherby choked, and stammered "Yes."

"He sings — er — very well, does n't he?"

The woman was still more visibly embarrassed.

"I — I don't know," she murmured; then in stronger tones, "The one that looked like him did."

"Are there two?" he asked in stupid amazement.

Miss Wetherby laughed uneasily, then she sighed.

"Well, ter tell the truth, Mr. Wiggins, I s'pose there ain't; but sometimes I think there

must be. I'll send Robert down ter the rehearsal to-night, and you can see what ye can do with him." And with this Mr. Wiggins was forced to be content.

Bobby sang on Sunday. The little church was full to the doors. Bobby was already famous in the village, and people had a lively curiosity as to what this disquieting collector of bugs and snakes might offer in the way of a sacred song. The "nighty" was, perforce, absent, much to the sorrow of Ann; but the witchery of the glorious voice entered again into the woman's soul, and, indeed, sent the entire congregation home in an awed silence that was the height of admiring homage.

At breakfast time Monday morning, Bobby came downstairs with his brown paper parcel under his arm. Ann glanced at his woeful face, then went out into the kitchen and slammed the oven door sharply.

"Well, marm, I've had a bully time — sure's a gun," said the boy wistfully, following her.

Miss Wetherby opened the oven door and shut it with a second bang; then she straightened herself and crossed the room to the boy's side.

"Robert," she began with assumed sternness, trying to hide her depth of feeling, "you ain't a-goin' home ter-day — now mind what I say! Take them things upstairs. Quick — breakfast's all ready!"

A great light transfigured Bobby's face. He tossed his bundle into a corner and fell upon Miss Wetherby with a bearlike hug.

"Gee-whiz! marm — but yer *are* a brick! An' I'll run yer errands an' split yer wood, an' I won't take no dogs an' cats in the parlor, an' I'll do ev'rythin' — ev'rythin' ye want me to! Oh, golly — golly! — I'm goin' ter stay — I'm goin' ter stay!" And Bobby danced out of the house into the yard there to turn somersault after somersault in hilarious glee.

A queer choking feeling came into Ann Wetherby's throat. She seemed still to feel the loving clasp of those small young arms.

"Well, he — he's part angel, anyhow," she muttered, drawing a long breath and watching with tear-dimmed eyes Bobby's antics on the grass outside.

And Bobby stayed — not only Monday, but through four other long days — days which he

filled to the brim with fun and frolic and joyous shouts as before — and yet with a change.

The shouts were less shrill and the yells less prolonged when Bobby was near the house. No toads nor cats graced the parlor floor, and no bugs nor snakes tortured Miss Wetherby's nerves when Bobby's bed was made each day. The kitchen woodbox threatened to overflow — so high were its contents piled — and Miss Wetherby was put to her wits' end to satisfy Bobby's urgent clamorings for errands to run.

And when the four long days were over and Saturday came, a note — and not Bobby — was sent to the city. The note was addressed to "Miss Ethel Wetherby," and this is what Ethel's amazed eyes read:

My Dear Niece: —You can tell that singer man of Robert's that he is not going back any more. He is going to live with me and go to school next winter. I am going to adopt him for my very own. His father and mother are dead — he said so.

I must close now, for Robert is hungry, and wants his dinner.

Love to all,

Ann Wetherby.

"GEE-WHIZ! MARM — BUT YER *ARE* A BRICK!"

The Lady in Black

THE house was very still. In the little room over the porch the Lady in Black sat alone. Near her a child's white dress lay across a chair, and on the floor at her feet a tiny pair of shoes, stubbed at the toes, lay where an apparently hasty hand had thrown them. A doll, head downward, hung over a chair-back, and a toy soldier with drawn sword dominated the little stand by the bed. And everywhere was silence — the peculiar silence that comes only to a room where the clock has ceased to tick.

The clock — such a foolish little clock of filigree gilt — stood on the shelf at the foot of the bed; and as the Lady in Black looked at it she remembered the wave of anger that had surged over her when she had thrust out her hand and silenced it that night three months before. It had seemed so monstrous to her that the pulse in that senseless thing of gilt should throb on unheeding while below, on the

little white bed, that other pulse was so pitiably still. Hence she had thrust out her hand and stopped it. It had been silent ever since — and it should remain silent, too. Of what possible use were the hours it would tick away now? As if anything mattered, with little Kathleen lying out there white and still under the black earth!

"Muvver!"

The Lady in Black stirred restlessly, and glanced toward the closed door. Behind it she knew was a little lad with wide blue eyes and a dimpling mouth who wanted her; but she wished he would not call her by that name. It only reminded her of those other little lips — silent now.

"*Muvver!*" The voice was more insistent.

The Lady in Black did not answer. He might go away, she thought, if she did not reply.

There was a short silence, then the door-knob rattled and turned half around under the touch of plainly unskilled fingers. The next moment the door swung slowly back on its hinges and revealed at full length the little figure in the Russian suit.

"Pe-eek!" It was a gurgling cry of joyful discovery, but it was followed almost instantly by silence. The black-garbed, unsmiling woman did not invite approach, and the boy fell back at his first step. He hesitated, then spoke, tentatively, "I's — here."

It was, perhaps, the worst thing he could have said. To the Lady in Black it was a yet more bitter reminder of that other one who was not there. She gave a sharp cry and covered her face with her hands.

"Bobby, Bobby, how can you taunt me with it?" she moaned, in a frenzy of unreasoning grief. "Go away — go away! I want to be alone — alone!"

All the brightness fled from the boy's face. His mouth was no longer dimpled, and his eyes showed a grieved hurt in their depths. Very slowly he turned away. At the top of the stairs he stopped and looked back. The door was still open, and the Lady in Black still sat with her hands over her face. He waited, but she did not move; then, with a half-stifled sob, he dropped on the top step and began to bump down the stairs, one at a time.

Long minutes afterward the Lady in Black raised her head and saw him through the window. He was down in the yard with his father, having a frolic under the apple tree.

A frolic!

The Lady in Black looked at them with somber eyes, and her mouth hardened at the corners. Bobby down there in the yard could laugh and dance and frolic. Bobby had some one to play with him, some one to love him and care for him; while out there on the hillside Kathleen was alone — all alone. Kathleen had no one —

With a little cry the Lady in Black sprang to her feet and hurried into her own room. Her hands shook as she pinned on her hat and shrouded herself in the long folds of her black veil; but her step was firm as she swept downstairs and out through the hall.

The man under the apple tree rose hurriedly and came forward.

"Helen, dearest, — not again, to-day!" he begged. "Darling, it can't do any good!"

"But she's alone — all alone. You don't seem to think! No one thinks — no one knows how

"I'S — HERE"

I feel. You don't understand — if you did, you'd come with me. You would n't ask me to stay — here!" choked the woman.

"I have been with you, dear," said the man gently. "I've been with you to-day, and every day, almost, since — since she left us. But it can't do any good — this constant brooding over her grave. It only makes additional sorrow for you, for me, and for Bobby. Bobby is — here, you know, dear!"

"No, no, don't say it," sobbed the woman wildly. "You don't understand — you don't understand!" And she turned and hurried away, a tall black shadow of grief, followed by the anguished eyes of the man, and the wistful puzzled eyes of the boy.

It was not a long walk to the tree-embowered plot of ground where the marble shafts and slabs glistened in the sunlight, and the Lady in Black knew the way; yet she stumbled and reached out blindly, and she fell, as if exhausted, before a little stone marked "Kathleen." Near her a gray-haired woman, with her hands full of pink and white roses, watched her sympathetically. She hesitated, and opened her lips

as if she would speak, then she turned slowly and began to arrange her flowers on a grave near by.

At the slight stir the Lady in Black raised her head. For a time she watched in silence; then she threw back her veil and spoke.

"You care, too," she said softly. "You understand. I've seen you here before, I'm sure. And was yours — a little girl?"

The gray-haired woman shook her head.

"No, dearie, it's a little boy — or he was a little boy forty years ago."

"Forty years — so long! How could you have lived forty years — without him?"

Again the little woman shook her head.

"One has to — sometimes, dearie; but this little boy was n't mine. He was none of my kith nor kin."

"But you care — you understand. I've seen you here so often before."

"Yes. You see, there's no one else to care. But there was once, and I'm caring now — for her."

"For — her?"

"His mother."

"Oh-h!" It was a tender little cry, full of quick sympathy — the eyes of the Lady in Black were on the stone marked "Kathleen."

"It ain't as if I did n't know how she'd feel," muttered the gray-haired little woman musingly, as she patted her work into completion and turned toward the Lady in Black. "You see, I was nurse to the boy when it happened, and for years afterward I worked in the family; so I know. I saw the whole thing from the beginning, from the very day when the little boy here met with the accident."

"Accident!" It was a sob of anguished sympathy from Kathleen's mother.

"Yes. 'T was a runaway; and he did n't live two days."

"I know — I know!" choked the Lady in Black — yet she was not thinking of the boy and the runaway.

"Things stopped then for my mistress," resumed the little gray-haired woman, after a moment, "and that was the beginning of the end. She had a husband and a daughter, but they did n't count — not either of 'em. Nothin' counted but this little grave out here; and

she came and spent hours over it, trimmin' it with flowers and talkin' to it."

The Lady in Black raised her head suddenly and threw a quick glance into the other's face; but the gray-haired woman's eyes were turned away, and after a moment she went on speaking.

"The house got gloomier and gloomier, but she did n't seem to mind. She seemed to want it so. She shut out the sunshine and put away lots of the pictures; and she would n't let the pianner be opened at all. She never sat anywhere in the house only in the boy's room, and there everything was just as 't was when he left it. She would n't let a thing be touched. I wondered afterward that she did n't see where 't was all leadin' to — but she did n't."

" 'Leading to'?" The voice shook.

"Yes. I wondered she did n't see she was losin' 'em — that husband and daughter; but she did n't see it."

The Lady in Black sat very still. Even the birds seemed to have stopped their singing. Then the gray-haired woman spoke:

"So, you see, that's why I come and put

flowers here — it's for her sake. There's no one else now to care," she sighed, rising to her feet.

"But you have n't told yet — what happened," murmured the Lady in Black, faintly.

"I don't know myself — quite. I know the man went away. He got somethin' to do travelin', so he was n't home much. When he did come he looked sick and bad. There were stories that he wa'n't quite straight always — but maybe that wa'n't true. Anyhow, he come less and less, and he died away — but that was after she died. He's buried over there, beside her and the boy. The girl — well, nobody knows where the girl is. Girls like flowers and sunshine and laughter and young folks, you know, and she did n't get any of them at home. So she went — where she did get 'em, I suppose. Anyhow, nobody knows just where she is now. . . . There, and if I have n't gone and tired you all out with my chatter!" broke off the little gray-haired woman contritely. "I'm sure I don't know why I got to runnin' on so!"

"No, no — I was glad to hear it," faltered

the Lady in Black, rising unsteadily to her feet. Her face had grown white, and her eyes showed a sudden fear. "But I must go now. Thank you." And she turned and hurried away.

The house was very still when the Lady in Black reached home — and she shivered at its silence. Through the hall and up the stairs she went hurriedly, almost guiltily. In her own room she plucked at the shadowy veil with fingers that tore the filmy mesh and found only the points of the pins. She was crying now — a choking little cry with broken words running through it; and she was still crying all the while her hands were fumbling at the fastenings of her somber black dress.

Long minutes later, the Lady — in Black no longer — trailed slowly down the stairway. Her eyes showed traces of tears, and her chin quivered, but her lips were bravely curved in a smile. She wore a white dress and a single white rose in her hair; while behind her, in the little room over the porch, a tiny clock of filigree gilt ticked loudly on its shelf at the foot of the bed.

There came a sound of running feet in the hall below; then:

"Muvver! — it's muvver come back!" cried a rapturous voice.

And with a little sobbing cry Bobby's mother opened her arms to her son.

The Saving of Dad

ON the boundary fence sat James, known as "Jim"; on the stunted grass of the neighboring back yard lay Robert, known as "Bob." In age, size, and frank-faced open-heartedness the boys seemed alike; but there were a presence of care and an absence of holes in Jim's shirt and knee-breeches that were quite wanting in those of the boy on the ground. Jim was the son of James Barlow, lately come into the possession of the corner grocery. Bob was the son of "Handy Mike," who worked out by the day, doing "odd jobs" for the neighboring housewives.

"I hain't no doubt of it," Bob was saying, with mock solemnity. "Yer dad can eat more an' run faster an' jump higher an' shoot straighter than any man what walks round."

"Shucks!" retorted the boy on the fence, with a quick frown. "That ain't what I said, and you know it."

"So?" teased Bob. "Well, now, 't was all I

could remember. There's lots more, 'course, only I furgit 'em, an' —"

"Shut up!" snapped Jim tersely.

" 'Course ev'ry one knows he's only a sample," went on Bob imperturbably. "An' so he's handsomer an' —"

"Will you quit?" demanded Jim sharply.

"No, I won't," retorted Bob, with a quick change of manner. "You've been here just two weeks, an' it hain't been nothin' but 'Dad says this,' an' 'Dad says that,' ever since. Jiminy! a feller'd think you'd made out ter have the only dad that's goin'!"

There was a pause — so long a pause that the boy on the grass sent a sideways glance at the motionless figure on the fence.

"It wa'n't right, of course," began Jim, at last, awkwardly, "crowin' over dad as I do. I never thought how — how 't would make the rest of you fellers feel." Bob, on the grass, bridled and opened his lips, but something in Jim's rapt face kept him from giving voice to his scorn. " 'Course there ain't any one like dad — there can't be," continued Jim hurriedly. "He treats me white, an' he's straight

there every time. Dad don't dodge. Maybe I should n't say so much about him, only — well, me an' dad are all alone. There ain't any one else; they're dead."

The boy on the grass turned over and kicked both heels in the air; then he dug at the turf with his forefinger. He wished he would *not* think of his mother and beloved little sister May just then. He opened his eyes very wide and winked hard, once, twice, and again. He tried to speak; failing in that, he puckered his lips for a whistle. But the lips twitched and would not stay steady, and the whistle, when it came, sounded like nothing so much as the far-away fog-whistle off the shore at night. With a snort of shamed terror lest that lump in his throat break loose, Bob sprang upright and began to turn a handspring with variations.

"Bet ye can't do this," he challenged thickly.

"Bet ye I can," retorted Jim, landing with a thump at Bob's side.

It was after supper the next night that the two boys again occupied the fence and the grass-plot. They had fallen into the way of discussing at this time the day's fires, dog-

fights, and parades. To-day, however, fires had been few, dog-fights fewer, and parades so very scarce that they numbered none at all. Conversation had come to a dead pause, when Jim, his eyes on the rod of sidewalk visible from where he sat, called softly:

"Hi, Bob, who's the guy with the plug?"

Bob raised his head. He caught a glimpse of checkered trousers, tail-coat, and tall hat, then he dropped to the ground with a short laugh.

"Yes, who is it?" he scoffed. "Don't ye know?"

"Would I be askin' if I did?" demanded Jim.

"Humph!" grunted the other. "Well, you'll know him fast enough one of these days, sonny, never fear. There don't no one hang out here more'n a month 'fore he spots 'em."

" 'Spots 'em'! "

"Sure! He's Danny O'Flannigan."

"Well?"

Into Bob's face came a look of pitying derision.

" 'Well,' " he mocked. "Mebbe 't will be 'well,' an' then again mebbe 't won't. It all depends on yer dad."

"On *dad!*"

"Sure! He's Danny O'Flannigan, the boss o' this ward."

"But what has that got to do with my dad?"

"Aw, come off — as if ye did n't know! It all depends whether he's nailed him or not."

" 'Nailed him'!"

"Sure. If he nails him fur a friend, he gits customers an' picnics an' boo-kays all the time. If he don't —" Bob made a wry face and an expressive gesture.

The frown that had been gathering on Jim's brow fled.

"Ho!" he laughed. "Don't you worry. Dad always nails folks — never misses hittin' 'em on the head, either," he added, in reckless triumph, confident that there was nothing "dad" could not do.

The boy on the grass sat up and stared; then he lay back and gave a hoarse laugh — a long, chuckling laugh that brought the frown back to Jim's face.

"Well, what you laughin' at?" demanded Jim sharply.

"Oh, gee, gee! — that's too good!" gurgled

the boy on the grass, rolling from side to side. "The saint, the sample, the pattern, the feller what treats 'em square, a-sellin' his vote! Oh, gee, gee!"

The ground suddenly shook with the impact of two sturdy little feet, and Bob found his throat in the grasp of two strong little hands.

"Bob Sullivan, quit yer laughin' an' tell me what you're talkin' about," stormed a shrill treble. "Who's a-sellin' their vote?"

Bob squirmed and struggled.

"A feller — can't talk — without — breathin'!" he choked.

"Well, then, — breathe!" commanded Jim, jerking his companion to a sitting posture and loosening his clasp on his throat. "Now — who's a-sellin' their vote?"

"Ye said it yerself, I did n't," snarled Bob sullenly.

"Said what?"

"That yer dad would nail Danny O'Flannigan, sure."

"And is that sellin' his vote?"

"What else is it, then?" demanded Bob wrathfully. "He votes as Danny says, an'

Danny sends him trade, an' — oh, oh, q-quit it — q-quit it— I say!" choked Bob, breath and speech almost cut off by the furious clutch of Jim's lean little fingers.

"I won't quit it; I won't!" stormed Jim, shaking his victim with a force that was as strong as it was sudden. "You know I never meant it that way; an' dad won't sell his vote; he won't — he won't — he won't!"

The next instant a wrathful, palpitating Bob lay alone on the grass, while a no less wrathful and palpitating Jim vaulted the fence at a bound and disappeared into the next house.

Jim awoke the next morning with a haunting sense that something had happened. In a moment he remembered; and with memory came rage and a defiant uptilting of the chin.

As if dad — *dad* could do this thing! Very possibly — even probably — Handy Mike had long ago gone down before this creature in the checkered trousers and tall hat; but dad — dad was not Handy Mike!

The ins and outs, the fine points, the ethics of it all were not quite clear to Jim; but the derision in Bob's laugh was unmistakable; and

on that derision and on that laugh hung his unfaltering confidence that dad would not, could not, do anything to merit either.

For three nights the boys shunned the fence and the back yard. On the fourth night, as if by common impulse, each took his accustomed place, wearing an elaborate air of absolute forgetfulness of the past. There had been two fires and a parade that day, so any embarrassment that the situation held was easily talked down. Not until Handy Mike on the side porch of his dilapidated cottage had greeted a visitor did there come a silence between the two boys. Even then it did not last long, for Bob broke it with a hoarse whisper.

"It's Danny O'Flannigan, sure's a gun! It's gittin' mos' 'lection-time, an' he's drummin' 'em up. Now, jest watch pap. He hain't no use fur Danny. Oh, of course," he added, in hurried conciliation, "'t ain't as if it made any diff'rence ter pap. Pap works fur the women-folks, an' women don't cut much ice in pol'tics."

And Jim did watch — with his eyes wide open and his hands so tightly clenched they

fairly ached. He could not hear the words, but he could the voices, and he noted that for the first five minutes one was jovial, the other sullen; and for the next five minutes one was persuasive, the other contradictory; and for the third five minutes one was angry and the other back to its old sullenness. Then he saw that Danny O'Flannigan jerked himself to his feet and strode away, leaving Handy Mike stolidly smoking on the side porch.

"Humph!" muttered Bob. "Danny hung to longer 'n I thought he would. Must be somethin' special's up."

It was on the next night that Jim, from his perch on the back fence, saw the checkered trousers and tall hat on his own doorstep. Bob, on the grass below, could not see, so Jim held his breath while the door opened and his father admitted Danny O'Flannigan to the house.

Jim's heart swelled, and his eyes flashed with pride. Now, we should see how a *man* dealt with this thing. Surely now there would be no fifteen minutes' dallying. Danny O'Flannigan would soon find out what sort of a person he had

to deal with. He would see that dad was not Handy Mike.

It was on Jim's lips to speak to Bob, that Bob might share with him the sight of Danny O'Flannigan's discomfiture. He longed to display this overwhelming proof of the falseness of Bob's assertion that dad would sell his vote; but — best let by-gones be by-gones; he had punished Bob for that, and, after all, Handy Mike *was* Bob's father. He could tell Bob of it later — how dad had sent Danny O'Flannigan to the right-about at once. Yes, that was the better way.

So Jim schooled himself to hide his exultation, and he listened with well-feigned interest to Bob's animated account of the morning's fire.

Two, three, five minutes passed, and Danny O'Flannigan had not come out. Jim hitched about on his narrow perch, and sent furtive glances across the expanse of yard to his own door. Six, seven, ten minutes passed; Jim's throat grew dry, and his fingers cold at their tips. His eyes had long ago ceased to look at Bob; they were fixed in growing horror on that

closed door, behind which were dad — and that man. Eleven, thirteen, fifteen minutes passed.

"I — I'm goin' in now," faltered Jim. "I — I reckon I don't feel well," he finished thickly, as he slipped to the ground and walked unsteadily across the yard.

In the woodshed he stopped short at the kitchen door. A murmur of voices came from far inside, and Jim's knees shook beneath him — it was not so — it could not be possible that dad was *still* talking! Jim stole through the back hallway and out on to the grass beneath the sitting-room windows on the other side of the house. The voices were louder now — the visitor's very loud.

Jim raised his head and tried to smile.

Of course! — dad was sending him about his business, and the man was angry — that was it. It had taken longer than he thought, but dad — dad never did like to hurt folks' feelings. Some men — some men did not care how they talked; but not dad. Why, dad — dad did not even like to kill a mouse; he —

There came the sound of a laugh — a long,

ringing laugh with a gleeful chuckle at the end. Jim grew faint. That was — *dad!*

Ten seconds later the two men in the sitting-room were confronted by a white-faced, shaking boy.

"Maybe you did n't know, Mr. O'Flannigan," began Jim eagerly, "maybe you did n't know that dad don't speak sharp. He ain't much for hurtin' folks' feelings; but he means it just the same — that he won't do what you want him to do. He 's square and straight — dad is, an' he don't dodge; but maybe you thought 'cause he laughed that he was easy — but he ain't. Why, dad would n't —"

"Tut, tut, not so fast, my boy," cut in Danny O'Flannigan pompously. "Your father has already —"

A strong hand gripped O'Flannigan's shoulder, and an agonized pair of eyes arrested his words.

"For God's sake, man," muttered Barlow, "have you no mercy? Think — have you no son of your own that believes you 're almost — God Himself?"

For a brief instant Danny O'Flannigan's eye-

brows and shoulders rose in an expressive gesture, and his hands made a disdainful sweep; then his eyes softened strangely.

"As you please," he said, and reached for his hat with an air that was meant to show indifference. "Then the deal is off, I suppose."

"There!" crowed Jim, as the door clicked behind the checkered trousers. "There, I knew you'd do it, dad. Just as if — Why, dad, you're — *cryin'!* Pooh! who cares for Danny O'Flannigan?" he soothed, patting the broad shoulders bowed low over the table. "I would n't cry for him!"

Millionaire Mike's Thanksgiving

HE was not Mike at first; he was only the Millionaire — a young millionaire who sat in a wheel chair on the pier waiting for the boat. He had turned his coat-collar up to shut out the wind, and his hatbrim down to shut out the sun. For the time being he was alone. He had sent his attendant back for a forgotten book.

It was Thanksgiving, but the Millionaire was not thankful. He was not thinking of what he had, but of what he wanted. He wanted his old strength of limb, and his old freedom from pain. True, the doctors had said that he might have them again in time, but he wanted them now. He wanted the Girl, also. He would have her, to be sure, that very evening; but he wanted her now.

The girl had been very sweet and gentle about it, but she had been firm. As he could

recollect it, their conversation had run something like this:

"But I want you myself, all day."

"But, Billy, don't you see? I promised; besides, I ought to do it. I am the president of the club. If I shirk responsibility, what can I expect the others to do?"

"But I need you just as much — yes, more — than those poor families."

"Oh, Billy, how can you say that, when they are so very poor, and when every one of them is the proud kind that would simply rather starve than go after their turkey and things! That's why we girls take them to them. Don't you see?"

"Oh, yes, I see. I see I don't count. It could n't be expected that I'd count — now!" And he patted the crutches at his side.

It was despicable in him, and he knew it. But he said it. He could see her eyes now, all hurt and sorrowful as she went away. . . . And so this morning he sat waiting for the boat, a long, lonely day in prospect in his bungalow on the island, while behind him he had left the dearest girl in the world, who, with other petted

darlings of wealth and luxury, was to distribute Thanksgiving baskets to the poor.

Not that his day needed to be lonely. He knew that. A dozen friends stood ready and anxious to supply him with a good dinner and plenty of companionship. But he would have none of them. As if *he* wanted a Thanksgiving dinner!

And thus alone he waited in the wheel chair; and how he abhorred it — that chair — which was not strange, perhaps, considering the automobile that he loved. Since the accident, however, his injured back had forbidden the speed and jar of motor cars, allowing only the slow but exasperating safety of crutches and a wheel chair. To-day even that seemed denied him, for the man who wheeled his chair did not come.

With a frown the Millionaire twisted himself about and looked behind him. It was near the time for the boat to start, and there would not be another for three hours. From the street hurried a jostling throng of men, women, and children. Longingly the Millionaire watched them. He had no mind to spend the next three hours where he was. If he could be pushed on

to the boat, he would trust to luck for the other side. With his still weak left arm he could not propel himself, but if he could find some one —

Twice, with one of the newspapers that lay in his lap, he made a feeble attempt to attract attention; but the Millionaire was used to commanding, not begging, and his action passed unnoticed. He saw then in the crowd the face of a friend, and with a despairing gesture he waved the paper again. But the friend passed by unheeding. What happened then was so entirely unexpected that the Millionaire fell back in his chair dumb with amazement.

"Here, Mike, ye ain't on ter yer job. Youse can't sell nuttin' dat way," scoffed a friendly voice. "Here, now, watch!" And before the Millionaire could collect his wits he saw the four papers he had bought that morning to help beguile a dreary day, snatched into the grimy hands of a small boy and promptly made off with.

The man's angry word of remonstrance died on his lips. The boy was darting in and out of the crowd, shouting "Poiper, here's yer poiper!" at the top of his voice. Nor did he return

until the last pair of feet had crossed the gang-plank. Then in triumph he hurried back to the waiting man in the wheel chair and dropped into his lap a tiny heap of coppers.

"Sold out, pardner! Dat's what we be," he crowed delighted. "Sold out!"

"But — I — you — " gasped the man.

"Aw, furgit it — 't wa'n't nuttin'," disdained the boy airily. "Ye see, youse got ter holler."

"To — to 'holler'!"

"Sure, Mike, or ye can't sell nuttin'. I been a-watchin' ye, an' I see right off ye wa'n't on ter yer job. Why, pardner, ye can't sell poipers like ye was shellin' out free sody-checks at a picnic. Youse got ter yell at 'em, an' git dere 'tention. 'Course, ye can't run like I can" — his voice softened awkwardly as his eyes fell to the crutches at the man's side — "but ye can holler, an' not jest set dere a-shakin' 'em easy at 'em, like ye did a minute ago. Dat ain't no way ter sell poipers!"

With a half-smothered exclamation the Millionaire fell back in his chair. He knew now that he was not a millionaire, but a "Mike" to the

boy. He was not William Seymore Haynes, but a cripple selling papers for a living. He would not have believed that a turned-up collar, a turned down soft hat, and a few jerks of a newspaper could have made such a metamorphosis.

"Youse'll catch on in no time now, pardner," resumed the boy soothingly, "an' I'm mighty glad I was here ter set ye goin'. Sure, I sells poipers meself, I does, an' I knows how 't is. Don't look so flabbergasted. 'T ain't nuttin'. Shucks! hain't fellers what 's pardners oughter do a turn fur 't odder?"

The Millionaire bit his lip. He had intended to offer money to this boy, but with his gaze on that glowing countenance, he knew that he could not. He had come suddenly face to face with something for which his gold could not pay.

"Th-thank you," he stammered embarrassedly. "You — you were very kind." He paused, and gazed nervously back toward the street. "I — I was expecting some one. We were going to take that boat."

"No! Was ye? An' he did n't show up? Say, now, dat 's tough — an' T'anksgivin', too!"

"As if I cared for Thanksgiving!" The words came tense with bitterness.

"Aw, come now, furgit it!" There was a look of real concern on the boy's face. "Dat ain't no way ter talk. It 's T'anksgivin'!"

"Yes, I know — for some." The man's lips snapped shut grimly.

"Aw, come off! Never mind if yer pal did n't show up. Dere 's odders; dere 's me now. Tell ye what, youse come home wid me. Dere won't be no boat now fur a heap o' time, an' I 'm goin' ter T'anksgive. Come on! 'T ain't fur. I'll wheel ye."

The man stared frankly.

"Er — thank you," he murmured, with an odd little laugh; "but —"

"Shucks! 'Course ye can. What be ye goin' ter do? — set here? What 's the use o' mopin' like dis when youse got a invite out ter T'anksgivin'?' An' ye better catch it while it 's goin', too. Ye see, some days I could n't ask ye — not grub enough; but I can ter-day. We got a s'prise comin'."

"Indeed!" The tone was abstracted, almost irritable; but the boy ignored this.

"Sure! It 's a dinner — a T'anksgivin' dinner bringed in to us. Now ain't ye comin'?"

"A dinner, did you say? — brought to you?"

"Yeaup!"

"Who brings it?"

"A lady what comes ter see me an' Kitty sometimes; an' she 's a peacherino, she is! She said she 'd bring it."

"Do you know — her name?" The words came a little breathlessly.

"You bet! Why, she 's our friend, I tell ye! Her name is Miss Daisy Carrolton; dat 's what 't is."

The man relaxed in his chair. It was the dearest girl in the world.

"Say, ain't ye comin'?" urged the boy, anxiously.

"Coming? Of course I 'm coming," cried the man, with sudden energy. "Just catch hold of that chair back there, lad, and you 'll see."

"Say, now, dat 's sumpin' like," crowed the boy, as he briskly started the chair. " 'T ain't fur, ye know."

Neither the boy nor the Millionaire talked much on the way. The boy was busy with his

task; the man, with his thoughts. Just why he was doing this thing was not clear even to the man himself. He suspected it was because of the girl. He could fancy her face when she should find that it was to him she was bringing her turkey dinner! He roused himself with a start. The boy was speaking.

"My! but I'm glad I stopped an' watched ye tryin' ter sell poipers. T'ink o' youse a-settin' dere all dis time a-waitin' fur dat boat — an' T'anksgivin', too! An' don't ye worry none. Ma an' Kitty 'll be right glad to see ye. 'T ain't often we can have comp'ny. It 's most allers us what 's takin' t'ings give ter us—not givin' ourselves."

"Oh," replied the man uncertainly. "Is — is that so?"

With a distinct shock it had come to the millionaire that he was not merely the disgruntled lover planning a little prank to tease the dearest girl in the world. He was the honored guest of a family who were rejoicing that it was in their power to give a lonely cripple a Thanksgiving dinner. His face grew red at the thought.

"Ugh-uh. An', oh, I say, what *is* yer name,

pardner?" went on the boy. "'Course I called ye 'Mike,' but —"

"Then suppose you still call me 'Mike,'" retorted the man, nervously wondering if he *could* play the part. He caught a glimpse of the beaming face of his benefactor — and decided that he *must* play it.

"A' right, den; an' here we be," announced the boy in triumph, stopping before a flight of steps that led to a basement door.

With the aid of his crutches the man descended the steps. Behind him came the boy with the chair. At the foot the boy flung wide the door and escorted his guest through a dark, evil-smelling hallway, into a kitchen beyond.

"Ma! Kitty! look a-here!" he shouted, leaving the chair, and springing into the room. "I've bringed home comp'ny ter dinner. Dis is Mike. He was sellin' poipers down ter de dock, an' he lost his boat. I told him ter come on here an' eat wid us. I knowed what was comin', ye see!"

"Why, yes, indeed, of course," fluttered a wan-faced little woman, plainly trying not to look surprised. "Sit down, Mr. Mike," she finished, drawing up a chair to the old stove.

"Thank you, but I — I —" The man looked about for a means of escape. In the doorway stood the boy with the wheel chair.

"Here, Mr. Mike, mebbe youse wanted dis. Say, Kitty, ain't dis grand?" he ended admiringly, wheeling the chair to the middle of the room.

From the corner came the tap of crutches, and the man saw then what he had not seen before; a slip of a girl, perhaps twelve years old, with a helpless little foot hanging limp below the skirt-hem.

"Oh, oh!" she breathed, her eyes aflame with excitement. "It is — it is — a *wheel* one! Oh, sir, how glad and proud you must be — with that!"

The man sat down, though not in the wheel chair. He dropped a little helplessly into the one his hostess had brought forward.

"Perhaps you — you'd like to try it," he managed to stammer.

"Oh, can I? Thank you!" breathed a rapturous voice. And there, for the next five minutes, sat the Millionaire watching a slip of a girl wheeling herself back and forth in his chair —

his chair, which he had never before suspected of being "fine" or "wonderful" or "grand" — as the girl declared it to be.

Shrinkingly he looked about him. Nowhere did his eyes fall upon anything that was whole. He had almost struggled to his feet to flee from it all when the boy's voice arrested him.

"Ye see, it's comin' 'bout noon — de grub is; an' it's goin' ter be all cooked so we can begin ter eat right off. Dere, how's dat?" he questioned, standing away to admire the propped-up table he and his mother were setting with a few broken dishes. "Now ain't ye glad youse ain't down dere a-waitin' fur a boat what don't come?"

"Sure I am," declared the man, gazing into the happy face before him, and valiantly determining to be Mike now no matter what happened.

"An' ain't the table pretty!" exulted the little girl. "I found that chiny cup with the gold on it. 'Course it don't hold nothin', 'cause the bottom 's fell out; but it looks pretty — an' looks counts when comp'ny 's here!"

The boy lifted his head suddenly.

"Look a-here! I'll make it hold sumpin'," he

cried, diving his hands into his pockets, and bringing out five coppers and a dime. "Youse jest wait. I'll get a posy up ter de square. 'Course, we'd ought ter have a posy, wid comp'ny here."

"Hold on!" The Millionaire's hand was in his pocket now. His fingers were on a gold piece, and his eyes — in fancy — were on a glorious riot of Jacqueminots that filled the little room to overflowing, and brought a wondrous light to three pairs of unbelieving eyes — then Mike remembered. "Here," he said a little huskily, "let me help." But the fingers, when he held them out, carried only the dime that Mike might give, not the gold piece of the Millionaire.

"Aw, g'wan," scoffed the boy, jubilantly. "As if we'd let comp'ny pay! Dis is our show!" And for the second time that day the Millionaire had found something that money could not buy.

And thus it happened that the table, a little later, held a centerpiece of flowers — four near-to-fading pinks in a bottomless, gold-banded china cup.

It was the man who heard the honk of a motor-car in the street outside. Instinctively he braced himself, and none too soon. There was a light knock, then in the doorway stood the dearest girl in the world, a large basket and a box in her hands.

"Oh, how lovely! You have the table all ready," she exclaimed, coming swiftly forward. "And what a fine — *Billy!*" she gasped, as she dropped the box and the basket on the table.

The boy turned sharply.

"Aw! Why did n't ye tell a feller?" he reproached the man; then to the Girl: "*Does* ye know him? He *said* ter call him 'Mike.'"

The man rose now. With an odd directness he looked straight into the Girl's startled eyes.

"Maybe Miss Carrolton don't remember me much, as I am now," he murmured.

The Girl flushed. The man, who knew her so well, did not need to be told that the angry light in her eyes meant that she suspected him of playing this masquerade for a joke, and that she did not like it. Even the dearest girl in the world had a temper — at times.

"But why — are you — here?" she asked in a cold little voice.

The man's eyes did not swerve.

"Jimmy asked me to come."

"He asked you to come!"

"Sure I did," interposed Jimmy, with all the anxiety of a host who sees his guest, for some unknown reason, being made uncomfortable. "I knowed youse would n't mind if we did ask comp'ny ter help eat de dinner, an' he lost his boat, ye see, an' had a mug on him as long as me arm, he was that cut up 'bout it. He was sellin' poipers down t' de dock."

"Selling papers!"

"As it happened, I did not *sell* them," interposed the man, still with that steady meeting of her eyes. "Jimmy sold them for me. He will tell you that I was n't on to my job, so he helped me out."

"Aw, furgit it," grinned Jimmy sheepishly. "Dat wa'n't nuttin'. I only showed him ye could n't sell no poipers widout hollerin'."

A curious look of admiration and relief came to the face of the Girl. Her eyes softened. "You mean — "

She stopped, and the man nodded his head gravely.

"Yes, miss. I was alone, waiting for Thompson. He must have got delayed. I had four papers in my lap, and after Jimmy had sold them and the boat had gone, he very kindly asked me to dinner, and — I came."

"Whew! Look at dis!" cried an excited voice. Jimmy was investigating the contents of the basket. "Say, Mike, we got turkey! Ye see," he explained, turning to Miss Carrolton, "he kinder hung back fur a while, an' wa'n't fast on comin'. An' I did hope 't would be turkey — fur comp'ny. Folks don't have comp'ny ev'ry day!"

"No, folks don't have company every day," repeated the Girl softly; and into the longing eyes opposite she threw, before she went away, one look such as only the dearest girl in the world can give — a look full of tenderness and love and understanding.

Long hours later, in quite a different place, the Girl saw the man again. He was not Mike now. He was the Millionaire. For a time he

talked eagerly of his curious visit, chatting excitedly of all the delightful results that were to come from it; rest and ease for the woman; a wheel chair and the best of surgeons for the little girl; school and college for the boy. Then, after a long minute of silence, he said something else. He said it diffidently, and with a rush of bright color to his face — he was not used to treading quite so near to his heart.

"I never thought," he said, just touching the crutches at his side, "that I 'd ever be thankful for — for these. But I was — almost — to-day. You see, it was they that — that brought me — my dinner," he finished, with a whimsicality that did not hide the shake in his voice.

When Mother Fell Ill

TOM was eighteen, and was spending the long summer days behind the village-store counter — Tom hoped to go to college in the fall.

Carrie was fifteen; the long days found her oftenest down by the brook, reading — Carrie was a bit romantic, and the book was usually poetry.

Robert and Rosamond, the twins — known to all their world as "Rob" and "Rose" — were eight; existence for them meant play, food, and sleep. To be sure, there were books and school; but those were in the remote past or dim future together with winter, mittens, and fires. It was summer, now — summer, and the two filled the hours with rollicking games and gleeful shouts — and incidentally their mother's workbasket with numerous torn pinafores and trousers.

Behind everything, above everything, and beneath everything, with all-powerful hands

and an all-wise brain, was mother. There was father, of course; but father could not cook the meals, sweep the rooms, sew on buttons, find lost pencils, bathe bumped foreheads, and do countless other things. So thought Tom, Carrie, and the twins that dreadful morning when father came dolefully downstairs and said that mother was sick.

Mother sick! Tom stared blankly at the sugar bowl, Carrie fell limply into the nearest chair, and the twins began to cry softly.

The next thirty-six hours were never forgotten by the Dudleys. The cool nook in the woods was deserted, and Carrie spent a hot, discouraged morning in the kitchen — sole mistress where before she had been an all too seldom helper. At noon Mr. Dudley and Tom came home to partake of underdone potatoes and overdone meat. The twins, repressed and admonished into a state of hysterical nervousness, repaired directly after dinner to the attic. Half an hour later a prolonged wail told that Rob had cut his finger severely with an old knife; and it was during the attendant excitement that Rose managed to fall the entire length of

the attic stairs. At night, after a supper of soggy rolls and burnt omelet, Mr. Dudley sent an appealing telegram to "Cousin Helen"; and the next afternoon, at five, she came.

Miss Helen Mortimer was pretty, sweet-tempered, and twenty-five. The entire family fell captive to her first smile. There was a world of comfort and relief in her very presence, and in the way she said cheerily:

"We shall do very well, I am sure. Carrie can attend to her mother, and I will take the helm downstairs."

The doctor said that rest and quiet was what Mrs. Dudley most needed, so Carrie's task would be comparatively light; and with a stout woman to come twice a week for the heavy work downstairs, the household gave promise of being once more on a livable basis.

It was at breakfast the next morning that the first cloud appeared on Miss Mortimer's horizon. It came in the shape of the crisply fried potatoes she was serving. The four children were eating late after their father had left.

"Oh, Cousin Helen," began Tom, in an

annoyed manner, "I forgot to tell you; I don't like fried potatoes. I have baked ones."

"Baked ones?"

"Yes; mother always baked them for me."

"Oh, that 's too bad; you can't eat them, then, — they hurt you!"

Tom laughed.

"Hurt me? Not a bit of it! I don't like them, that's all. Never mind; you can do it to-morrow."

When "to-morrow" came Miss Mortimer had not forgotten. The big round dish was heaped with potatoes baked to a turn.

"Thank you, I'll take the fried," said Carrie, as the dish was passed to her.

"The f-fried?" stammered Miss Mortimer.

"Yes; I prefer those."

"But there *are* no fried. I baked them."

"Well, how funny!" laughed Carrie. "I thought we had it all fixed yesterday. I thought we were to have both fried and baked. Mother always did, you know. You see, we don't like them the same way. Never mind," she added with a beaming smile, quite misunderstanding the look on her cousin's face, "it does n't matter

a bit and you must n't feel so bad. It 'll be all right to-morrow, I 'm sure."

"Yes, and I want buckwheat cakes, please," piped up Rob.

"All right, you shall have them," agreed Cousin Helen with a smile.

Tom laughed.

"Maybe you don't quite know what you 're getting into, Cousin Helen," he suggested. "If you make buckwheat cakes for Rob — it means graham muffins for Rose."

"And she shall have them; the very next morning, too."

"Oh, no, that will never do. She demands them the same day."

"What!"

"Oh, I thought you did n't understand," chuckled Tom. "When you make one, you have to make both. Mother always did — she had to; 't was the only way she could suit both the twins, and I don't believe you 'll find any other way out of it. As for us — we don't mind; we eat them all!"

"Oh!" said Cousin Helen faintly.

"And another thing," resumed Tom, "we

might as well settle the drink question right away — of course you'll want to know. Father is the only one who drinks cereal coffee. We (Carrie and I) like the real thing, every time; and the twins have cocoa — weak, of course, so there 's not much to it."

"And you must n't sweeten mine while you 're cooking it," interposed Rose decidedly.

"Sure enough — lucky you thought of that," laughed Tom, "or else poor Cousin Helen would have had another mistake to fret over. You see," he explained pleasantly, "Rose insists on putting in *all* the sugar herself, so hers has to be made unsweetened; but Rob is n't so particular and prefers his made in the regular way — sweetened while cooking, you know."

"Oh, I make two kinds of cocoa, do I?" asked Cousin Helen.

"Yes — er — that is, in two ways."

"Hm-m; and coffee and the cereal drink, making four in all?" continued Cousin Helen, with ominous sweetness.

Tom stirred uneasily and threw a sharp glance into his cousin's face.

"Well — er — it does seem a good many;

but — well, mother did, you know, and we might as well have what we want, as something different, I suppose," he finished, with vague uneasiness.

"Oh, certainly, who would mind a small thing like that!" laughed Miss Mortimer, a queer little gleam in her eyes.

This was but the beginning. On the pantry-shelf were four kinds of cereals. Carrie explained that all were served each morning, for the family could n't agree on any particular one. As for eggs; Tom always had to have his dropped on a slice of toast; the twins liked theirs scrambled; but Carrie herself preferred hers boiled in the shell. Apple-pie must always be in the house for Tom, though it so happened, strangely enough, Carrie said, that no one else cared for it at all.

"Mother was always making apple-pie," laughed Carrie apologetically. "You see, they get stale so quickly, and Tom is the only one to eat them, they have to be made pretty often — one at a time, of course."

Bread, rolls, pastry, meat, vegetables — each had its own particular story, backed always by

that ever-silencing "mother did," until Miss Mortimer was almost in despair. Sometimes she made a feeble protest, but the children were so good-natured, so entirely unaware that they were asking anything out of the ordinary, and so amazed at any proposed deviation from the established rules, that her protests fell powerless at their feet.

"Mother did" — "mother did" — "mother did," Miss Mortimer would murmur wearily to herself each day, until she came to think of the tired little woman upstairs as "Mother Did" instead of "Aunt Maria." "No wonder 'Mother Did' fell ill," she thought bitterly. "Who would n't!"

The weeks passed, as weeks will — even the dreariest of them — and the day came for Cousin Helen to go home, Mrs. Dudley being now quite her old self. Loud were the regrets at her departure, and overwhelming were the thanks and blessings showered in loving profusion; but it was two weeks later, when Tom, Carrie, and the twins each sent her a birthday present, that an idea came to Miss Mortimer. She determined at once to carry it out, even

though the process might cause her some heartache.

Thus it came about that Tom, Carrie, Rob, and Rose, each received a letter (together with the gift each had sent) almost by return mail.

Tom's ran:

My dear Cousin: Thank you very much for the novel you sent me, but I am going to ask you to change it for a book of travels. I like that kind better, and mother and all my friends give me travels whenever they want to please me. I might as well have something I want as something different, I suppose, so I am asking you to change.

Very lovingly
YOUR COUSIN HELEN

Carrie read this:

My dear Carrie: Thank you for the pretty little turnover collar and cuffs you sent me for my birthday; but I think it is so funny you never noticed that I don't care for pink. Mother found it out even when I was but little more than a baby. Oh, I can wear it, but I don't care for it. Don't feel badly, however, my dear Carrie; all you've got to do is just to take these back and make me some blue ones, and I know you won't mind doing that.

Lovingly
COUSIN HELEN

Rob's letter ran:

My dear Rob: I am writing to thank you for the box of chocolates you sent yesterday. I am sending them back to you, though, because I seldom eat chocolates. Oh, no, they don't hurt me, but I don't like them as well as I do caramels, so won't you please change them? Mother gives me a box of candy every Christmas, but it is never chocolates. I know you would rather give me what I like, Rob, dear.

Lots of love

Cousin Helen

Rose had striven early and late over a crocheted tidy, spending long hours of her playtime in doing work to which her fingers were but little accustomed. She confidently expected a loving letter of thanks and praise, and could scarcely wait to open the envelope. This is what she read:

My dear Rose: Thank you very much for the tidy, dear, but whatever in the world caused you to make it in that stitch? I like shell-stitch ever so much better, so would you mind doing it over for me? I am returning this one, for maybe you will decide to ravel it out; if you don't, you can just make me a new one. Mother has crocheted several things for me, but most of them

are in shell-stitch, which, after all, is about the only stitch I care for.

Lots of love from
YOUR COUSIN HELEN

After a dazed five minutes of letter-reading, the four children hurried to the attic — always their refuge for a conference. There they read the four letters aloud, one after another. A dumfounded silence followed the last word. Rose was the first to break it.

"I think she's a mean old thing — so there!" Rose was almost crying.

"Hush, dear, hush!" choked Carrie. "She is n't mean; she 's good and kind — we know she is. She — she means something by it; she must. Let 's read them again!"

Bit by bit they went over the letters. It was at the third mention of "mother" that Tom raised his head with a jerk. He looked sheepishly into Carrie's face.

"I — I guess I know," he said with a shamefaced laugh.

It must have been a month later that Miss Mortimer received a letter from Mrs. Dudley.

One paragraph sent a quick wave of color to the reader's face; and this was the paragraph:

I am feeling better than for a long time. Some way, the work does n't seem nearly so hard as it used to. Perhaps it is because I am stronger, or perhaps it is because the children are not nearly so particular about their food as they used to be. I am so glad, for it worried me sometimes — they were so very fussy. I wondered how they would get along out in the world where "mother" could n't fix everything to their liking. Perhaps you noticed it when you were here. At any rate, they are lots better now. Perhaps they have outgrown it. I hope so, I'm sure.

The Glory and the Sacrifice

THE Honorable Peter Wentworth was not a church-going man, and when he appeared at the prayer-meeting on that memorable Friday evening there was at once a most irreligious interest manifested by every one present, even to the tired little minister himself. The object of their amazed glances fortunately did not keep the good people long in suspense. After a timid prayer — slightly incoherent, but abounding in petitions for single-mindedness and worshipful reverence — from the minister's wife, the Honorable Peter Wentworth rose to his feet and loudly cleared his throat:

"Ahem! Ladies and gentlemen — er — ah — brethren," he corrected, hastily, faint memories of a godly youth prompting his now unaccustomed lips; "I — er — I understand that you are desirous of building a new church. A very laudable wish — very," with his eyes fixed on a zigzag crack in the wall across the

room; "and I understand that your funds are — er — insufficient. I am, in fact, informed that you need two thousand dollars. Ahem! Ladies — er — brethren, I stand here to announce that on the first day of January I will place in your pastor's hands the sum of one thousand dollars, provided" — and he paused and put the tips of his forefingers together impressively — "provided you will raise an equal amount on your own part. The first day of next January, remember. You have nearly a year, you will notice, in which to raise the money. I — er — I hope you will be successful." And he sat down heavily.

The remainder of that meeting was not conspicuous for deep spirituality, and after the benediction the Honorable Peter Wentworth found himself surrounded by an excited crowd of grateful church members. The honorable gentleman was distinctly pleased. He had not given anything away before since — well, he had the same curious choking feeling in his throat now that he remembered to have felt when he gave the contents of his dinner pail to the boy across the aisle at the old red schoolhouse.

After all, it was a rather pleasant sensation; he almost wished it had oftener been his.

It was not until the silent hours of the night brought a haunting premonition of evil to the Reverend John Grey that the little minister began to realize what the church had undertaken. One thousand dollars! The village was small and the church society smaller. The Honorable Peter Wentworth was the only man who by even the politest fiction could be called rich. Where, indeed, was the thousand to be found?

When morning came, the Reverend John Grey's kindly blue eyes were troubled, and his forehead drawn into unwonted lines of care; but his fathers had fought King George and the devil in years long past, and he was a worthy descendant of a noble race and had no intention of weakly succumbing, even though King George and the devil now masqueraded as a two-thousand-dollar debt.

By the end of the week an urgent appeal for money had entered the door of every house in Fairville. The minister had spent sleepless nights and weary days in composing this masterly letter. His faithful mimeograph had saved

the expense of printing, and his youngest boy's willing feet had obviated the necessity of postage stamps. The First Congregational Church being the only religious organization in the town of Fairville, John Grey had no hesitation in asking aid from one and all alike.

This was in February, yet by the end of May there was only four hundred dollars in the fund treasury. The pastor sent out a second appeal, following it up with a house-to-house visit. The sum grew to six hundred dollars.

Then the ladies held a mass-meeting in the damp, ill-smelling vestry. The result was a series of entertainments varying from a strawberry festival to the "passion play" illustrated. The entertainers were indefatigable. They fed their guests with baked beans and "red flannel" hash, and acted charades from the Bible. They held innumerable guessing contests, where one might surmise as to the identity of a baby's photograph or conjecture as to the cook of a mince pie. These heroic efforts brought the fund up to eight hundred dollars. Two hundred yet to be found — and it was November!

With anxious faces and puckered brows, the

ladies held another meeting in that cheerless vestry — then hastened home with new courage and a new plan.

Bits of silk and tissue-paper, gay-colored worsteds and knots of ribbon appeared as by magic in every cottage. Weary fingers fashioned impossible fancy articles of no earthly use to any one, and tired housewives sat up till midnight dressing dolls in flimsy muslin. The church was going to hold a fair! Everything and everybody succumbed graciously or ungraciously to the inevitable. The prayer-meetings were neglected, the missionary meetings postponed, the children went ragged to school, and the men sewed on their own buttons. In time, however, the men had to forego even that luxury, and were obliged to remain buttonless, for they themselves were dragged into the dizzy whirl and set to making patchwork squares.

The culminating feature of the fair was to be a silk crazy quilt, and in an evil moment Miss Wiggins, a spinster of uncertain age, had suggested that it would be "perfectly lovely" to have the gentlemen contribute a square each. The result would have made the craziest in-

mate of a lunatic asylum green with envy. The square made by old Deacon White, composed of pieces of blue, green, scarlet, and purple silk fastened together as one would sew the leather on a baseball, came next to the dainty square of the town milliner's covered with embroidered butterflies and startling cupids. Nor were the others found wanting in variety. It was indeed a wonderful quilt.

The fair and a blizzard began simultaneously the first day of December. The one lasted a week, and the other three days. The people conscientiously ploughed through the snow, attended the fair, and bought recklessly. The children made themselves sick with rich candies, and Deacon White lost his temper over a tin trumpet he drew in a grab bag. At the end of the week there were three cases of nervous prostration, one of pneumonia, two of grippe — and one hundred dollars and five cents in money.

The ladies drew a long breath and looked pleased; then their faces went suddenly white. Where was ninety-nine dollars and ninety-five cents to come from in the few days yet remaining? Silently and dejectedly they went home.

It was then that the Reverend John Grey rose to the occasion and shut himself in his study all night, struggling with a last appeal to be copied on his faithful mimeograph and delivered by his patient youngest born. That appeal was straight from the heart of an all but despairing man. Was two thousand dollars to be lost — and because of a paltry ninety-nine dollars and ninety-five cents?

The man's face had seemed to age a dozen years in the last twelve months. Little streaks of gray showed above his temples, and his cheeks had pitiful hollows in them. The minister's family had meat but twice a week now. The money that might have bought it for the other five days had gone to add its tiny weight to the minister's contribution to the fund.

The pressure was severe and became crushing as the holidays approached. The tree for the Sunday-School had long since been given up, but Christmas Eve a forlorn group of wistful-eyed children gathered in the church and spoke Christmas pieces and sang Christmas carols, with longing gaze fixed on the empty corner where was wont to be the shining tree.

The Glory and the Sacrifice

It was on Christmas Day that the widow Blake fought the good fight in her little six-by-nine room. On the bed lay a black cashmere gown, faded and rusty and carefully darned; on the table lay a little heap of bills and silver. The woman gathered the money in her two hands and dropped it into her lap; then she smoothed the bills neatly one upon another, and built little pyramids of the dimes and quarters. Fifteen dollars! It must be five years now that she had been saving that money, and she did *so* need a new dress! She needed it to be — why — even decent! — looking sourly at the frayed folds on the bed.

It was on Christmas Day, too, that the little cripple who lived across the bridge received a five-dollar gold piece by registered mail. Donald's eyes shone and his thin fingers clutched the yellow gold greedily. Now he could have those books! — his eyes rested on an open letter on the floor by his chair; a mimeograph letter signed "John W. Grey." Gradually his fingers relaxed; the bit of money slipped from the imprisoning clasp, fell to the floor, and rolled in flashing, gleaming circles round and

round the letter, ending in a glistening disk, like a seal, just at the left of the signature. The lad looked at the yellow, whirling thing with frightened eyes, then covered his face with his hands, and burst into a storm of sobs.

On the 26th of December, the Reverend John Grey entered on his list: "Mrs. Blake, $15.00; Donald Marsh, $5.00."

The little minister's face grew pale and drawn. The money came in bit by bit, but it wanted twenty dollars and ninety-five cents yet to complete the needed thousand. On the 27th the teacher of the infant class brought a dollar, the gift of her young pupils. On the 28th, nothing came; on the 29th, five cents from a small boy who rang the bell with a peal that brought the Reverend John Grey to the door with a startled hope in his eyes. He took the five pennies from the small dirty fingers and opened his mouth to speak his thanks, but his dry lips refused to frame the words.

The morning of the 30th dawned raw and cloudy. The little minister neither ate nor slept now. The doorbell rang at brief intervals throughout the day, and stray quarters, dimes,

and nickels, with an occasional dollar, were added to the precious store until it amounted to nine hundred and eighty-nine dollars and eighty-five cents.

When the Reverend John Grey looked out of his bedroom window on the last day of that weary year, he found a snow-white world, and the feathery flakes still falling. Five times that day he swept his steps and shoveled his path — mute invitations to possible donors; but the path remained white and smooth in untrodden purity, and the doorbell was ominously silent.

He tried to read, to write, to pray; but he haunted the windows like a maiden awaiting her lover, and he opened the door and looked up and down the street every fifteen minutes. The poor man had exhausted all his resources. He himself had given far more than he could afford, and he had begged of every man, woman and child in the place. And yet — must two thousand dollars be lost, all for the lack of ten dollars and fifteen cents? Mechanically he thrust his hands into his pockets and fingered the few coins therein.

It was nearly midnight when there came a

gentle tap at the study door. Without waiting for permission the minister's wife turned the knob and entered the room. Her husband sat with bowed head resting on his outstretched arms on the desk, and her eyes filled with tears at the picture of despair before her.

"John, I suppose we can take this," said she, in a low voice, reluctantly laying a little pile of silver on the desk; "there's just ten dollars there." Then she recoiled in terror, so wildly did her husband clutch the money.

"Where did you get this?" he gasped.

"I — I saved it from time to time out of the household money. I meant you should take it and go out to Cousin Frank's for a rest and vacation after this was over," said she doggedly.

"Vacation! Mary — vacation!" he exclaimed, with unutterable scorn. Then he fumbled in his pocket and brought out a little change. With trembling fingers he picked out ten pennies and a five-cent piece, putting a lone quarter back in his empty pocket.

"Thank God, Mary, we've done it!" and the man's voice broke, and a big tear rolled down his cheek and splashed on a dingy nickel.

New Year's night there was a jubilee meeting in the town hall. The Reverend John Grey hurried through his bread-and-milk supper in some excitement. He was to preside, and must not be late.

The hall was full to overflowing. On the platform with the minister sat the deacons of the First Congregational Church — and the Honorable Peter Wentworth. The well-fed, well-groomed, honorable gentleman himself looked about with a complacent smile — this was indeed a most delightful occasion.

The Reverend John Grey's address was an eloquent tribute to the great generosity of their distinguished fellow-townsman. The minister's voice trembled affectingly, and his thin cheeks flushed with emotion. The First Congregational Church was deeply indebted to the Honorable Peter Wentworth, and would fain express its gratitude.

The minister's wife listened with a far-away look on her face, and little Donald Marsh gazed with round eyes of awe at the great man who had been so very generous; while over in an obscure corner of the hall a pale little woman

stealthily rearranged the folds of her gown, that she might hide from inquisitive eyes the great darn on the front breadth of her worn black cashmere.

The Daltons and the Legacy

THE legacy amounted to ten thousand dollars; and coming as it did from a little known, scarcely remembered relative it seemed even more unreal than the man who had bequeathed it. Not until lawyers' visits and numerous official-looking papers had convinced the Daltons beyond the smallest doubt did the family believe their good fortune genuine; then, with the conviction, came all the overwhelming ambitions and unsatisfied longings of past years.

"There, now we can leave the farm," exulted Mrs. Dalton.

"Why, Sarah, do — do you think that is quite — wise?" asked her husband.

"Wise? Of course it is!" she returned decidedly. "Why, Caleb, don't you know? — we've always wanted to go to the city; and Cousin John said he'd give you a place in his store any time, so you'll earn something to start with right away. We never dared to before, you know, for you wa'n't sure how you'd do; but

now we've got all this money we shan't have to worry a mite. Oh, is n't it just splendid, Caleb?"

"Yes; but — " he hesitated.

"Why, Caleb, I don't believe you appreciate it a bit!"

"Oh, I do, indeed I do, Sarah, but —" again he hesitated.

"But there is n't any 'but,' Caleb," laughed Sarah, and turned to a boy of twelve and a girl of fourteen who entered the room at that moment. "We've got it all settled, children. We're going to Boston, sure, this fall."

"Oh, mother!" — Ethel's hands came together in ecstasy, while Fred whooped in glee.

"There's the lovely big stores and the people," cried Ethel.

"And the cars and Bunker Hill Monument," supplemented Fred.

"And we won't ever have to come back to this snippy little town," continued Ethel.

"My, won't Bill Higgins just stare!" interposed Fred. "Oh, I say, sis, we might come back just once, you know, just to tell them about things."

"Yes, that's so," agreed Ethel readily; "and —say, let's tell them now that we're going. Come on!" she finished over her shoulder as she flew through the door.

"There, Caleb, I told you how it would be," smiled Mrs. Dalton as the door banged behind Fred; then, anxiously: "You would n't want to spoil it all, now, would you?"

"N-no; but — no, no, of course not," murmured Caleb, rising to his feet and crossing to the outside door with heavy, slow-moving steps.

This was in August. By the middle of September such household goods as the Daltons had planned to take with them were packed, burlapped, crated, and labeled. It had been Mrs. Dalton's idea to sell the rest of the furniture and the farm at auction, but just here she encountered an unexpected but stubborn resistance from her husband. Consequently, the remainder of the goods were stored in the attic, and the farm was rented until the first of May — the house being close to the village, it made a not undesirable winter residence. A longer lease than this Caleb would not grant, in spite of his wife's remonstrances.

"Just as if we would want to come back by May, Caleb!" she scoffed. "Why, by that time we shall be real city folks, and you 'll be a partner in the business, maybe."

"Hm-m, — maybe," echoed Caleb imperturbably; "but — we 'll see when May comes."

"Cousin John" in Boston had received the news of their intended coming with cordial interest, and had already procured for them a six-room apartment in Roxbury; and it was in his thriving market and grocery store on Warren Avenue that Caleb was to have a position as clerk. The wages, at first, were not large — Cousin John explained when he good-naturedly ran up to the farm to make arrangements — but the figures looked fabulous to Sarah until John told her that they must pay twenty-five dollars every month for their flat.

"Twenty-five dollars, and not even a spare room!" she gasped. "Why, John, it 's too nice — it must be. We did n't want such a fancy one."

"Oh, 't is n't fancy," laughed the man, "not a bit! It 's clean and neat and on a respectable street. Land costs something down there, you

know. You have to pay something for rent. Why, I pay fifty, myself."

"Oh, oh!" moaned Sarah. Then she threw back her head with an assumed courage. "Never mind, I'll just have to change my plans a bit. I did n't intend to keep anything, but I can have just a few hens and a cow as well as not, and that will help some. Like enough I can sell a little butter and what eggs I don't use, too, and — " a long, hearty laugh interrupted her.

"Oh, Cousin Sarah, Cousin Sarah!" choked John, as soon as he could find his voice.

"Well," said Mrs. Dalton, with some dignity, "I'm waiting."

Cousin John pulled his face into shape and steadied his voice.

"Sarah, your flat is up three flights, and has n't even a back piazza. Where are you going to keep hens and cows?"

Mrs. Dalton's jaw fell.

"Three flights!" she gasped.

He nodded.

"And is n't there a yard, or — or anything?"

"Not that belongs to you — except the fire escape and a place on the roof to dry your

clothes." His lips were twitching, as Mrs. Dalton was not slow to see.

"Never mind," she retorted airily. "I did n't want them, anyhow, and, after all, we've got the money, so why can't we take a little good in spending it!"

Some weeks later when Mrs. Dalton saw her new home, she did n't know whether to laugh or to cry. The three long flights of stairs and dim, narrow halls filled her with dismay, but the entrance with its shining letter-boxes and leaded-glass door-panels overwhelmed her with its magnificence. The big brick block in which she was to live looked like a palace to her eyes; but the six rooms in which she was to stow herself and family amazed and disheartened her with their diminutiveness.

"Why, Caleb, I — I can't breathe — they 're so small!" she gasped. Then she broke off suddenly, as she glanced through the window: "Oh, my, my — who 'd ever have thought there were so many roofs and chimneys in the world!"

Getting settled was a wonderful experience. The Daltons had never moved before, and it took many days to bring even a semblance of order

out of the chaos into which the six small rooms were thrown by the unpacking of the boxes and barrels. The delay worried Sarah more than did the work itself.

"Oh, dear, Ethel," she moaned each afternoon, "we're so slow in getting settled, and I just know some one will call before we're even half fixed!"

At last the tiny "parlor" with its mirror-adorned mantel and showy gas fixtures — the pride of Sarah's heart — was in order; and, after that, Sarah made sure each day that three o'clock found her dressed in her best and sitting in solemn state in that same parlor waiting for the calls that were surely now long overdue.

Days passed, and her patience was unrewarded save for a sharp ring from a sewing-machine agent, and another from a book canvasser.

Sarah could not understand it. Surely, her neighbors in the block must know of her arrival even if those in her immediate vicinity on the street did not. Occasionally she met women in the halls, or going in and out of the big main door. At first she looked at them with a half-formed smile on her face, waiting for the

confidently expected greeting; later, she eyed them with a distinctly grieved expression — the greeting had never been given; but at last, her hunger to talk with some one not of her own family led her to take the initiative herself. Meeting a tall, slender woman, whom she had already seen three times, she spoke.

"How — how d'ye do?" she began timidly.

The tall woman started, threw a hurried glance around her, then came to the conclusion that the salutation was meant for herself.

"Good-morning," she returned, then hurried along through the hall.

Sarah stood looking after her with dazed eyes.

"Why, how funny!" she murmured. "She did n't even stop a minute. Maybe she 's sort of bashful, now. I should n't wonder a mite if she was."

Three days later the two ladies again met at the outer door.

"Oh, how d'ye do? Nice day, ain't it?" began Sarah, hurriedly. "You — you live here, don't you?"

"Why — yes," said the woman, smiling a little.

"I do, too — on the top floor. You 're not so high up, are you?"

The woman shook her head.

"Not quite," she said.

"I — I'm all settled, now," announced Sarah, stumbling over the words a little.

"Is that so?" returned the woman politely, but without enthusiasm.

Sarah nodded.

"Yes, all ready for callers. I — I hope you 'll come soon," she finished with sudden courage.

"Thank you; you are very kind," murmured the woman, as she smiled and turned away.

The tall woman did not call, and Sarah never asked her again. A few words from Cousin John's wife at about this time opened Sarah's eyes, and taught her not to expect to become acquainted with her neighbors. At first Sarah was more than dismayed; but she quickly brought to bear the courage with which she fought all the strange things in this new life.

"Of course they can't call on every one, Cousin Mary," she said airily to John's wife; "and like enough they 're not the kind of folks I would care to know, anyhow."

Sarah was not the only member of the family who had found trials by the way. Ethel and Fred had entered school, and at first they came home each afternoon with woeful faces. New methods of study, recitation, discipline, and even of recreation puzzled and frightened them. They regularly begged each morning not to go back; but as regularly their mother's diplomatic bantering and systematic appeals to their pride conquered, and they started off at half-past eight, heads high, and chins bravely upraised.

To Caleb, the city was a thing of noise, hurry, and more people than he had thought existed. Early and late he worked in the store. To the "early" part he did not object — it even seemed late to his farm-bred ideas of early rising; but to the evenings — Caleb never understood the rush and confusion that entered the big market and grocery with the lighting of the flaring gas jets. To him it was a time for quiet meditation and sleep — not for haggling over the price of sugar and beans.

"I don't like it," he would say sometimes to his wife; "I don't like it, Sarah. This doling out

a peck of potatoes and two quarts of apples — why, Sarah, just think of the bushels and barrels I 've grown myself! It 's so small, Sarah, so small!"

"Of course it is now," comforted Sarah, "but only think what 't will be later on — only think."

December, January, February, and March passed; and the first of April brought a letter from the lessee of the farm asking if he was to have the place through the summer.

"Of course he can have it," declared Sarah. "Just as if we wanted it again!"

"Yes, yes, of course," murmured Caleb. "I— I'll write later on. He said if he heard by the middle of the month, 't would do."

It was an early, and a wonderfully beautiful spring that year. Warm, moist winds came up from the south and stirred the twigs and branches into life. The grass grew green on sunny slopes, and the tulips and crocuses turned the dull brown beds into riotous color and bloom. Caleb went out of his way each day that he might pass a tiny little park, and he always stopped there a motionless two minutes — he

would have told you that he was listening to the green things growing. Sarah grew restless indoors. She even crawled out on to the fire escape and sat there one day; but she never tried that but once.

Downstairs, on each side of the big front door was a square-yard patch of puny, straggling grass; and it was these two bits of possibilities that put a happy thought into Sarah's head. For three days she said nothing, but she fell into the way of going often in and out of that door, and always her eyes were hungrily fixed on one or the other of those squares. On the fourth day she bought a trowel and some flower seeds and set resolutely to work. She had dug the trowel into the earth four times, and was delightedly sniffing the odor from the moist earth when the janitor appeared.

"Did ye lose something, ma'am?" he asked suspiciously.

"Lose something?" laughed the woman. "Of course not! I've found something, William. I've found a flower bed. I'm going to have the prettiest one ever was."

"Oh, come now," began the man, plainly

disturbed, "that ain't going to do, you know. I'll have to —"

"Oh, I'll tend it," she interrupted eagerly. "You won't even have to touch it."

The man shook his head.

"T won't do, ma'am, — 't won't, really, now. I'm sorry, but the boss won't stand it."

"Won't stand it! — not even for flowers!" she gasped.

"No, ma'am" — the janitor's tone was firm but regretful. A queer feeling of sympathy came over him for this gentle little woman on the top floor whom he had always liked. "There hain't none of the tenants no business with them yards; he said so."

"Oh!" said Mrs. Dalton, "I — I'll go then." And she picked up the trowel and rose to her feet.

She passed the janitor without a word, her head held high, and her eyes looking straight before her; but once in the seclusion of the halls, her head drooped, and her eyes rained tears that rolled down her cheeks unceasingly all the way to the top floor.

It was that night that Caleb brought out the paper and pen to write the letter which would

lease the farm for another six months. Twice he dipped his pen in the ink, and paused with no word written. Finally he spoke.

"I — I'm going to give him some hints, Sarah. He won't know how to run some of the things, I'm sure. If he should plant the meadow lot to potatoes, now, it —"

"And, Caleb," cut in Sarah, "be sure and send word to his wife about the roses; if she don't spray 'em real early, the bugs and worms will get an awful start. Caleb, don't you remember how lovely that crimson rambler was last year?"

Caleb nodded; his eyes were fixed on the wall-paper.

"I — I wonder if this warm weather has made the leaves start out on it," resumed Sarah. "I hope not — you know we always have frosts up there."

"Hm-m," murmured Caleb.

There was a long silence; then Sarah drew a deep breath.

"Caleb, do you s'pose it 'll get up to the front-chamber window this year — that rosebush, I mean?"

"I don't know, Sarah." Caleb's eyes were still on the wall-paper.

There was another long silence, broken this time by the children's entrance.

"Mother," began Fred discontentedly, "don't they ever go fishing down here, or swimming, or anything?"

Sarah sprang to her feet with a nervous little laugh.

"Caleb, we — we might go up home just for — for a visit," she said.

"Hurrah! — let's!" crowed Fred; and Ethel clapped her hands.

"I'll do it," cried Caleb suddenly, bringing his fist down hard on his knee. "I'll write that we'll go up next week for three days. There's lots of room, and they can tuck us away somewhere for just that little time. We can show 'em things better than we can tell 'em, and I can close the deal when I get there."

It was a jubilant four that left the North Station a few days later, and it was a still more jubilant four that arrived in the village at the foot of the green hills. The Dalton's intended visit had been heralded far and near, and the

progress from the train to the farmhouse was a succession of hand-shakes and cordial greetings.

"Oh, don't it look splendid and roomy!" cried Sarah, as they reached the turn where they could see the farmhouse. "And don't the air smell good!"

"Hm-m," murmured Caleb, and turned his face away with set lips.

How crowded to overflowing those three days were! Caleb valiantly tried to give his intended suggestions, but the most of his time was spent in joyous tramps from one end of the farm to the other, that no favorite field nor pet pasture should escape his adoring eyes. Sarah, when not gloating over every tender shoot and starting bud in her flower garden, was being fêted and fed by the entire neighborhood.

"Oh, how good it is to just talk!" murmured Sarah, as she went to sleep that first night.

As for Fred and Ethel, they were scarcely seen at the farmhouse.

Just at dusk on the third day Caleb found his wife in the old summer-house. Wrapped in shawls, she was fastening vines to the trellis.

"I'VE GOT MY DOUBTS OF WEST"

"Well, Sarah, I — I s'pose I'd better settle up with West, now. I hain't yet, you know."

Sarah nodded, without speaking.

"I hain't seemed to amount to much about telling him things," continued Caleb. "Somehow, I did n't get time. He's careless, too; I'm afraid he ain't going to do well."

"She is, too," moaned Sarah. "She don't know a thing about roses. Caleb, do you think that rosebush will get up to that window?"

"I don't know," returned Caleb absently. Then, with a choke in his voice, he said: "Things look first-rate, now, but — I've got my doubts of West. I — I wish I could handle them myself."

Sarah threw a quick glance at his averted face.

"Well — why — don't you?" she almost whispered.

"Sarah!" exclaimed Caleb.

"Oh, here you are," cried Fred from the doorway. "Say, is it to-morrow we go? — just to-morrow? Why, we have n't done half that we wanted to!" Behind him stood Ethel, her eyes wistful, her mouth drooping at the corners.

Sarah drew a quick breath.

"Ask — ask your father," she faltered.

"Sarah, would you? — would you come back? Do you mean it?" cried Caleb, with a swift joy in his eyes.

Sarah burst into tears, and threw herself into her husband's arms. "Oh, Caleb, I — just would! I — I've wanted to ever so long, but — I just would n't own up."

"There, there," soothed the man, with loving pats, his face alight, "we'll come back, so we will; we'll come back right away."

Ethel and Fred ran shouting from the summer-house, and Sarah raised a tear-stained face.

"Well, anyhow," she laughed softly, "now we can see just how high that rosebush does get!"

The Letter

MONDAY noon the postman gave the letter to twelve-year-old Emily, and Emily in turn handed it to her young brother. Between the gate and the door, however, Teddy encountered Rover, and Rover wanted to play. It ended in the letter disappearing around the corner of the house, being fast held in the jaws of a small black-and-tan dog.

Five minutes later the assembled family in the dining-room heard of the loss and demanded an explanation.

"'T was n't t-ten minutes ago, mother," stammered Emily defensively. "The postman handed it to me and I gave it to Teddy to bring in."

"But whose letter was it?" demanded several voices.

Emily shook her head.

"I don't know," she faltered.

"Don't know! Why, daughter, how could you be so careless?" cried Mrs. Clayton. "It

is probably that note from the Bixbys — they were to write if they could not come. But I should like to know what they said."

"But it might have been to me," cut in Ethel. (Ethel was pretty, eighteen, and admired.)

There was a sudden exclamation across the table as James, the first-born, pushed back his chair.

"Confound it, Emily, you've got us in a pretty mess! It so happened I was looking for a letter myself," he snapped, as he jerked himself to his feet. "See here, Teddy, where did that rascally little dog go to? Come, let's go find Rover," he finished, stooping and lifting the small boy to his shoulder. The next moment the dining-room door had banged behind them.

"Dear, dear!" laughed Mrs. Clayton, a little hysterically, turning to her husband. "You don't happen to be expecting a letter, do you, Charles?"

"I do happen to be — and a very important one, too," returned the man; and Mrs. Clayton, after a nervous glance at his frowning face, subsided into her chair with a murmured word

of regret. When luncheon was over she slipped from the room and joined in the hunt for Rover.

They scoured the yard, the street, the house, and the woodshed, finding the culprit at last in the barn asleep under the big automobile. Of the letter, however, there was not a trace.

"Dear, dear, if dogs only could talk!" moaned Mrs. Clayton that night as, restless and full of fancies, she lay on her bed. "If only I knew where and what that letter was. But then, of course, it 's from the Bixbys; I 'm going to think so, anyway," she comforted herself, and resolutely closed her eyes.

"If that *should* be Dennison's letter," mused Mr. Clayton as he locked up the house; "if that should be — confound it, and I know it is! I 'd swear it! It serves me right, too, I suppose, for telling him to write me at the house instead of at the office. Confound that little beast of a dog!"

In the south chamber Ethel, sending long, even strokes over the brown satin of her hair, eyed her image in the glass with a plaintive pout.

"Now, if that letter *should* be an invitation from Fred!" she said aloud. "And when I 'd so

much rather go on that ride with him! Oh, dear! Where can Rover have put it?"

Across the hall James Clayton paced the room from end to end.

"Great Scott! What if it *were* May's letter, after all?" he groaned. "What a fool I was to leave it that if I did n't hear by Thursday night I 'd understand 't was 'no'! And now she may have written and be expecting me to-morrow, Wednesday, — *to-night*, even, and I not know it — tied hand and foot! Oh, hang that dog!"

Tuesday morning the family awoke and met at the breakfast table. The air was electric with unrest, and the food almost untouched. It was Mrs. Clayton who broke the long silence that followed the morning's greetings.

"I — I don't think I'll do much to get ready for the Bixbys," she began; "I 'm so sure that letter was from them."

"You mean that, Julia?" demanded her husband, brightening. "Are you really positive?"

"Yes, really positive. They said all the time that they did n't think they could come, and that without doubt I should get a letter saying so."

"Then of course 't was it," asserted Ethel, her face suddenly clearing.

"Of course," echoed her brother with a promptitude that hinted at more than a willingness to be convinced that the letter was the Bixbys' and none other.

It was about ten minutes past five that afternoon when the four Bixbys came.

"There, we did get here!" they chorused gleefully.

"Yes, yes, I see, I see," murmured Mrs. Clayton, and signaled to Ethel to hurry into the kitchen and give the alarm to the cook. "Then you — you did n't write?"

"Write? Why, no, of course not! We were n't to, you know, if we could come."

"Yes — er — I mean no," stammered Mrs. Clayton, trying to calculate just how long it would take the maid to put three rooms in order.

At half-past six the family, with their guests, sat down to a dinner that showed unmistakable signs of having been started as a simple one for six, and finished as a would-be elaborate one for ten. To the faces of Mr. Clayton, Ethel, and James the cloud of the morning had returned.

Mrs. Clayton, confident that the missing letter contained nothing worse for her than its absence had already brought her, looked comparatively serene.

After dinner, as by common consent, Mr. Clayton and his elder son and daughter met in a secluded corner of the library.

"Hang it all, dad, *now* whose letter do you suppose that was?" began James aggressively.

"It 's mine," groaned the father, with a shake of his head. "I know it 's mine."

"But it might n't be," demurred Ethel, with a hesitation that showed a fear lest her suggestion meet with prompt acceptance.

"I tell you I know it 's mine," retorted Mr. Clayton, and Ethel sighed her relief. "I did hope 't was your mother's," he continued; "but I might have known better. It 's mine, and — and it means dollars to me — hundreds of them."

"Why, father!" The two voices were one in shocked surprise.

"Well, it does. Dennison was going to drop me a line here if certain things happened. And if they have happened, and I don't sell my P. & Z. before to-morrow noon, it 'll mean —

well, there 'll be something to pay. On the other hand, if those certain things have n't happened, and I do sell — it 'll be worse."

"Well, well," laughed James in a surprisingly buoyant tone, considering the gloom on his father's face. "I guess the letter was yours all right. I should take it so, anyhow, and go ahead and sell."

"Yes, so should I," tossed Ethel over her shoulder as she tripped happily away.

"After all," mused James, slowly crossing the hall, "it could n't have been my letter. May would n't have written so soon; she 'd have waited until nearer Thursday. She would n't let me have the 'yes' quite so quickly. Not she! — the little tease of a sweetheart!"

On Wednesday morning, at half-past eight, the maid brought in the mail and laid it at her master's plate. There were a paper and two letters.

"Hm-m," began Mr. Clayton, "one for you, Julia, my dear, and — by Jove, it 's Dennison's letter!" he finished joyfully, thrusting an eager thumb under the flap of the other envelope.

Twenty minutes later, with head erect and

shoulders squared, the senior member of the firm of Clayton & Company left his home and hurried down the street. Behind him, on the veranda steps, were a young man and a young girl looking into each other's faces in blank dismay.

"You — you said *you* were expecting a letter, did n't you?" began Ethel hopefully.

"Well, so were you, were n't you?" The tone showed quick irritation.

"Why, yes, but —"

"Well, don't you think it is yours?"

"Why, I — I don't know. It might be, of course; but —"

"You *said* you thought it was yours, the very first thing."

"Yes, I know; but — well, perhaps it is."

"Of course it is," asserted James, as he ran down the steps. And Ethel, looking after him, frowned in vague wonder.

Thursday morning's mail brought four letters, and Ethel blushed prettily as she tucked them all in her belt.

"But they are n't all yours," protested her brother James.

"But they are!" she laughed.

"All?"

"All."

"But *I* was expecting a letter."

"Oh-ho! — so you were, were you?" teased the girl merrily. Ethel could afford to be merry; she had recognized a certain bold handwriting on one of the envelopes. "I really don't see, then, but you 'll have to go to Rover. Perhaps he can tell you where it is."

"Confound that dog!" growled James, turning on his heel.

"I'm going to accept Fred's invitation," soliloquized Ethel happily, as she hurried into her own room. "I shall read his first, so, of course, that will be the first one that I get!"

The noon delivery brought no letters for any one. James Clayton fidgeted about the house all the afternoon instead of going down to the golf club to see the open handicap — the annual club event. He felt that, in the present state of affairs, he could take no chances of seeing a certain young woman who was just then very much in his thoughts. If she *had* written, and he should meet her as though she had not! —

his blood chilled at the thought; and if she had not written, and he should meet her as though she had! — To James Clayton, at the moment, the thought of her precious letter lost forever to his longing eyes was only a shade worse than that there should have been no letter at all.

Five o'clock came, bringing the last mail — and still no letter. In the Clayton residence that night dinner was served at a table which showed a vacant place; James Clayton was reported to be indisposed. Yet, two hours later, after a sharp peal of the doorbell and a hasty knocking at his chamber door by the maid, James Clayton left the house; and one who met him on the steps said that his face was certainly not that of a sick man.

It was after breakfast the next morning, before the family had dispersed, that Ethel rushed headlong into the dining-room.

"Oh, James, James!" she cried breathlessly. "It *was* your letter that Rover had, and here 't is!"

"But it was n't," retorted the young man airily. "I got mine last night — special delivery."

"But it is yours. Teddy found it in a hole under the barn. See!" crowed Ethel; and she thrust into his hand a tattered, chewed, bedraggled envelope whose seal was yet unbroken.

"Well, by George — 't is for me," muttered the young man, as he descried his own name among the marks left by dirt-stained paws and sharp little teeth. "Humph!" he ejaculated a moment later, eyeing the torn and crumpled sheet of paper which the envelope had contained.

"Well?" prompted several voices.

"It 's an advertising letter from the Clover Farm kennels," he announced, with a slight twitching of his lips. "Do you think we — er — need another — dog?"

The Indivisible Five

AT the ages of fifty-four and fifty, respectively, Mr. and Mrs. Wentworth found themselves possessed of a roomy, old-fashioned farmhouse near a thriving city, together with large holdings of lands, mortgages, and bank stock. At the same time they awoke to an unpleasant realization that many of their fellow creatures were not so fortunate.

"James," began Mrs. Wentworth, with some hesitation, one June day, "I've been thinking — with all our rambling rooms and great big yards, and we with never a chick nor a child to enjoy them — I've been thinking — that is, I went by the orphan asylum in town yesterday and saw the poor little mites playing in that miserable brick oven they call a yard, and — well, don't you think we ought to have one — or maybe two — of them down here for a week or two, just to show them what summer really is?"

The man's face beamed.

"My dear, it's the very thing! We'll take two — they'll be company for each other; only" — he looked doubtfully at the stout little woman opposite — "the worst of it will come on you, Mary. Of course Hannah can manage the work part, I suppose, but the noise — well, we'll ask for quiet ones," he finished, with an air that indicated an entirely satisfactory solution of the problem.

Life at "Meadowbrook" was a thing of peaceful mornings and long, drowsy afternoons; a thing of spotless order and methodical routine. In a long, childless marriage Mr. and Mrs. Wentworth's days had come to be ordered with a precision that admitted of no frivolous deviations: and noise and confusion in the household machinery were the unforgivable offenses. It was into this placid existence that Mr. and Mrs. Wentworth proposed to introduce two children from the orphan asylum.

Before the week was out a note was sent to the matron of the institution, and the prospective host and hostess were making their plans with unwonted excitement.

"We'll rise at six and breakfast at seven," began Mrs. Wentworth.

"And they must be in bed by eight o'clock," supplemented her husband.

"I did n't say whether to send boys or girls, and I forgot to say anything about their being quiet; but if they 're boys, you can teach them gardening, James, and if they 're girls, they can sew with me a good deal."

"Hm-m — yes; I really don't know what we shall do to entertain them. Perhaps they might like to read," suggested Mr. Wentworth, looking with some doubt at his big bookcases filled with heavy, calf-bound volumes.

"Of course; and they can walk in the garden and sit on the piazza," murmured Mrs. Wentworth happily.

In the orphan asylum that same evening there was even greater excitement. Mrs. Wentworth's handwriting was not of the clearest, and her request for "two" children had been read as "ten"; and since the asylum — which was only a small branch of a much larger institution — had recently been depleted until it contained but five children, the matron was

sorely perplexed to know just how to fill so generous an order. It ended in her writing an apologetic note to Mrs. Wentworth and dispatching it the next morning by the hand of the eldest girl, Tilly, who was placed at the head of four other jubilant children, brushed, scrubbed, and admonished into a state of immaculate primness.

At half-past nine o'clock the driver of the big carry-all set five squirming children on to their feet before the front door at "Meadowbrook," and rang the bell.

"Here you are," he called gayly, as Hannah opened the door. "I've washed my hands of 'em — now they're yours!" And he drove briskly out of the yard.

Hannah neither moved nor spoke. She simply stared.

"Here's a note," began Tilly, advancing shyly, "for Mis' Wentworth."

Mechanically Hannah took the note and, scarcely realizing what she was doing, threw open the door of the parlor — that parlor which was sacred to funerals, weddings, and the minister's calls.

The children filed in slowly and deposited themselves with some skill upon the slippery haircloth chairs and sofa. Hannah, still dazed, went upstairs to her mistress.

"From the asylum, ma'am," she said faintly, holding out the note.

Mrs. Wentworth's eyes shone.

"Oh, the children! Where are they, Hannah?"

"In the parlor, ma'am."

"The parlor? Why, Hannah, the parlor is no place for those two children!" Mrs. Wentworth started toward the door.

Hannah coughed and uptilted her chin.

"They ain't two, ma'am. There's as much as half a dozen of 'em."

"What!"

"There is, ma'am."

"Why, Hannah, what—" The lady tore open the note with shaking fingers, and read:

My dear Madam: You very generously asked for ten children, but I hope you will pardon me for sending only five. That is all we have with us now, owing to several recent adoptions from our ranks — you know we are never very large, being only a branch of the Hollingsworth Asylum. The

children were so crazy, though, at the idea of a trip to the country, that I am sure each child will have fun enough — and make noise enough, also, I fear — for two, so in the end you may think you've got your ten children, after all. You must be fond of children to be willing to give so many a two-weeks' vacation, but you don't know what a lot of good you are doing. If you could have seen the children when I read them your note, you would have been well repaid for all your trouble. I wish there were more like you in the world.

Yours respectfully,

AMANDA HIGGINS.

"Hannah," faltered Mrs. Wentworth, dropping into her chair, "they did n't read my note right. They — they've actually sent us the whole asylum!"

"Well, it looks like it — downstairs," returned Hannah grimly.

"Sure enough, they *are* downstairs, and I must go to them," murmured Mrs. Wentworth, rising irresolutely to her feet. "I — I'll go down. I'll have to send all but two home, of course," she finished, as she left the room.

Downstairs she confronted five pairs of eyes shining out at her from the gloom.

"Good-morning, children," she began, trying

to steady her voice. "There is — er — I — well —" She stopped helplessly, and a small girl slid to the floor from her perch on the sofa and looked longingly toward the hall.

"Please, ma'am, there's a kitty out there; may I get it?" she asked timidly.

"Please, have you got a dog, too?" piped up a boy's voice.

"An' chickens an' little pigs? They said you had!" interposed a brown-eyed girl from the corner.

"An' there's hammocks an' swings, maybe," broke in Tilly; "an' please, ma'am, may n't we go outdoors and begin right away? Two weeks is an awful short time, you know, for all we want to do," she finished earnestly.

Four pairs of feet came down to the floor with a thump and eight small boots danced a tattoo of impatience on the parlor carpet — the small girl was already out in the hall and on her knees to the cat.

"Why, yes, — that is — you see, there was a mistake; I —" Mrs. Wentworth stopped suddenly, for as soon as the "yes" had left her lips the children had fled like sheep.

She stepped to the front door and looked out. A boy was turning somersaults on the grass. Three girls had started a game of tag. Watching all this with eager eyes was a boy of eight, one foot tightly bound into an iron brace. It was on this child that Mrs. Wentworth's eyes lingered the longest.

"Poor little fellow! Well, he shall be one of the two," she murmured, as she hurried out to Hannah.

"When they going, ma'am?" began Hannah, with an assurance born of long service.

"I — I haven't told them; I — well, I waited for Mr. Wentworth," confessed her mistress hastily. Then, with some dignity: "They can just as well have to-day outdoors, anyway."

It was nearly noon when Mr. Wentworth drove into the yard, gave his horse into the care of Bill, the man-of-all-work, and hurried into the house.

"Mary, Mary — where are you?" he called sharply. Never before had James Wentworth broken the serene calm of his home with a voice like that.

"Yes, dear, I'm here — in the dining-room."

Mrs. Wentworth's cheeks were flushed, her hair was disordered, and her neck-bow was untied; but she was smiling happily as she hovered over a large table laden with good things and set for six.

"You can sit down with them, James," she exclaimed; "I'm going to help Hannah serve them."

"Mary, what in the world does this mean? The yard is overrun with screaming children! Have they sent us the whole asylum?" he demanded.

Mrs. Wentworth laughed hysterically.

"That's exactly what they have done, dear. They took my 'two' for a 'ten,' and — and they did the best they could to supply my wants!"

"Well, but — why don't you send them home? We can't —"

"Yes, yes; I know, dear," interrupted the woman hastily, the happy look gone from her eyes. "After dinner I am — that is, you may send all but two home. I thought I'd let them play awhile."

"Humph!" ejaculated the man; "send them

home? — I should think so!" he muttered, as his wife went to call the children to dinner.

What a wonderful meal that was, and how the good things did vanish down those five hungry throats!

The man at the head of the table looked on in dumb amazement, and he was still speechless when, after dinner, five children set upon him and dragged him out to see the bird's nest behind the barn.

"An' we found the pigs an' the chickens, Mister, jest as they said we would," piped up Tommy eagerly, as they hurried along.

"An' a teeny little baby cow, too," panted the smaller girl, "an' I fed him."

"Well, I guess you could n't 'a' fed him if I had n't held him with the rope," crowed Bobby.

"Or if I had n't scared him with my stick!" cut in Tilly. "I guess you ain't the only pebble on the beach, Bobby Mack!"

"Good Heavens!" groaned Mr. Wentworth, under his breath. "And have I got to keep two of these little hoodlums for a whole fortnight? Er — children," he said aloud, after the bird's

nest had been duly admired; "er — suppose we go and — er — read."

Into the house trooped the five chattering boys and girls in the wake of an anxious, perplexed man. Some minutes later the children sat in a stiff row along the wall, while the man, facing them, read aloud from a ponderous calf-bound volume on "The Fundamental Causes of the Great Rebellion."

For some time Mr. Wentworth read without pausing to look up, his sonorous voice filling the room, and his mind wholly given to the subject in hand; then he raised his eyes — and almost dropped the book in his hand: Tommy, the cripple, sat alone.

"Why, where — what —" stammered Mr. Wentworth.

"They 've gone out ter the barn, Mister," explained Tommy cheerfully, pointing to the empty chairs.

"Oh!" murmured Mr. Wentworth faintly, as he placed the book on the shelf. "I — er — I think we won't read any more.' '

"Come on, then; let's go to the barn," cried Tommy. And to the barn they went.

There were no "Fundamental Causes of the Great Rebellion" in the barn, but there were fundamental causes of lots of other things, and Mr. Wentworth found that now his words were listened to with more eagerness; and before he knew it, he was almost as excited as were the children themselves.

They were really a very intelligent lot of youngsters, he told himself, and the prospect of having two of them for guests did not look so formidable after all.

From the barn they went to the garden, from the garden to the pond, from the pond back to the yard; then they all sat down under the apple trees while Mr. Wentworth built them a miniature boat; in days long gone by James Wentworth had loved the sea, and boat-making had been one of his boyhood joys.

At four o'clock Mrs. Wentworth called from the house:

"James, will you come here a minute, please?"

A slow red stole over the man's face as he rose to his feet. The red was a deep crimson by the time he faced his wife.

"How are you going to send them home, dear?" she asked.

He shook his head.

"But it's four o'clock, and we ought to be thinking of it. Which two are you going to keep?"

"I — I don't know," he acknowledged.

For some unapparent reason Mrs. Wentworth's spirits rose, but she assumed an air of severity.

"Why, James! — have n't you told them?" she demanded.

"Mary, I could n't; I've been trying to all the afternoon. Er — you tell them — do!" he urged desperately. "I can't — playing with them as I have!"

"Suppose we keep them all, then?" she hazarded.

"Mary!"

"Oh, I can manage it! I've been talking with Hannah — I saw how things were going with you" — his features relaxed into a shame-faced smile — "and Hannah says her sister can come to help, and we 've got beds enough with the cots in the attic."

He drew a deep breath.

"Then we won't have to tell them!" he exclaimed.

"No, we won't have to tell them," she laughed, as she turned back into the house.

What a fortnight that was at "Meadowbrook!" The mornings — no longer peaceful — were full of rollicking games; and the long, drowsy afternoons became very much awake with gleeful shouts. The spotless order fled before the bats and balls and books and dolls that Mr. Wentworth brought home from the store; and the methodical routine of the household was shattered to atoms by daily picnics and frequent luncheons of bread and butter.

No longer were the days ordered with a precision that admitted of no frivolous deviations, for who could tell in the morning how many bumped heads, cut fingers, bruised noses and wounded hearts would need sympathetic attention before night?

And so it went on until the evening before the two weeks were completed; then, after the children were abed and asleep, the man and his wife talked it over.

"Well, this ends to-morrow, I suppose. You must be tired, Mary; it's been a hard time for you, dear," he began.

"Not a bit of it, James," she demurred. "Hannah and Betsey have done all the work, and you've been with the children so much I've not felt their care at all."

The man stirred uneasily.

"Well, I — I wanted to relieve you as much as possible," he exclaimed, wondering if she knew how many boats he had built for the boys, and how many jackknives he had broken in the process.

"Do you know? — I think I shall be actually lonely when they are gone," declared Mrs. Wentworth, without looking up.

The man threw a sharp glance at his wife.

"So shall I," he said.

"James, I've been wondering, could n't we — adopt one of them?" she suggested, trying to make it appear as if the thought had but just entered her head.

Again the man gave his wife a swift glance.

"Why — we — might — I suppose," he returned, hoping that his hesitation would indi-

cate that the idea was quite new to him — instead of having been almost constantly in his thoughts for a week.

"We might take two — company for each other, you know!" She looked at him out of the corner of her eye.

"Hm-m," he agreed pleasantly.

"The only trouble is the selecting, James."

"Yes, that is a drawback," murmured the man, with a vivid recollection of a certain afternoon under the apple trees.

"Well, I'll tell you" — Mrs. Wentworth leaned forward in sudden animation — "tomorrow you pick out the one you want and ask him — or her — to go into the parlor for a few minutes at nine o'clock in the morning, and I will do the same."

"Well, maybe," he began a little doubtfully, "but — "

"And if there are two, and you are n't real sure which you want, just ask both of them to go, and we 'll settle it together, later," she finished.

To this, with some measure of content, her husband agreed.

The next morning at ten minutes before nine Mrs. Wentworth began her search. With no hesitation she accosted the little cripple.

"Tommy, dear, I want you to go into the parlor for a few minutes. Take your book in there and read, and I'll come very soon and tell you what I want."

Tommy obeyed at once and Mrs. Wentworth sighed in relief. At that moment Tilly came into the garden.

What a dear little woman those two weeks of happiness had caused Tilly to become! How much she loved Tommy, and what care she took of him! Really, it was a shame to separate them — they ought to be brought up together — perhaps Mr. Wentworth would n't find any child that he wanted; anyway, she believed she should send Tilly in, at a venture.

A moment later Tilly was following in Tommy's footsteps. On the piazza steps sat Bobby — homely, unattractive Bobby, crying.

"Why, my dear!" remonstrated Mrs. Wentworth.

"Tommy 's gone! I can't find him," sobbed the boy.

Mrs. Wentworth's back straightened.

Of course Bobby cried — no one was so good to him as Tommy was — no one seemed to care for him but Tommy. Poor, homely Bobby! He had a hard row to hoe. He —

But she could n't take Bobby! Of course not — she had Tommy and Tilly already. Still —

Mrs. Wentworth stooped and whispered a magic word in Bobby's ear, and the boy sprang to his feet and trotted through the hall to the parlor door.

"I don't care," muttered Mrs. Wentworth recklessly. "I could n't bear to leave him alone out here. I can settle it later."

Twice she had evaded her husband during the last fifteen minutes; now, at nine o'clock, the appointed time, they both reached the parlor door. Neither one could meet the other's eyes, and with averted faces they entered the room together; then both gave a cry of amazement.

In the corner, stiff, uncomfortable, and with faces that expressed puzzled anxiety, sat five silent children.

Mrs. Wentworth was the first to recover presence of mind.

"There, there, dears, it's all right," she began a little hysterically. "You can call it a little game we were playing. You may all run outdoors now."

As the last white apron fluttered through the door she dropped limply into a chair.

"James, what in the world are we going to do?" she demanded.

"Give it up!" said the man, his hands in his pockets — James Wentworth's vocabulary had grown twenty years younger in the last two weeks.

"But really, it's serious!"

"It certainly is."

"But what *shall* we do?"

The man took his hands from his pockets and waved them in a manner that would indicate entire irresponsibility.

"We might end it as we did two weeks ago and keep the whole lot of them," she proposed merrily.

"Well — why don't you?" he asked calmly.

"James!"

His face grew red with a shame-faced laugh.

"Well — there *are* families with five children in them, and I guess we could manage it," he asserted in self-defense.

She sat up and looked at him with amazement.

"Surely we have money enough — and I don't know how we could spend it better," he continued rapidly; "and with plenty of help for you — there 's nothing to hinder turning ourselves into an orphan asylum if we want to," he added triumphantly.

"Oh, James, could we — do you think?" she cried, her eyes shining with a growing joy. "Tommy, and Tilly, and all? Oh, we will — we will! And — and — we'll never have to choose any more, will we, James?" she finished fervently.

The Elephant's Board and Keep

ON twelve hundred dollars a year the Wheelers had contrived to live thus far with some comforts and a few luxuries — they had been married two years. Genial, fun-loving, and hospitable, they had even entertained occasionally; but Brainerd was a modest town, and its Four Hundred was not given to lavish display.

In the bank Herbert Wheeler spent long hours handling money that was not his, only to hurry home and spend other long hours over a tiny lawn and a tinier garden, where every blade of grass and every lettuce-head were marvels of grace and beauty, simply because they were his.

It was June now, and the lawn and the garden were very important; but it was on a June morning that the large blue envelope came.

Herbert went home that night and burst into the kitchen like a whirlwind.

"Jessica, we've got one at last," he cried.

"One what?"

"An automobile."

Jessica sat down helplessly. In each hand she held an egg — she had been selecting two big ones for an omelet.

"Herbert, are you crazy? What are you talking about?" she demanded.

"About our automobile, to be sure," he retorted. "'T was Cousin John's. I heard to-day — he's left it to us."

"To *us!* But we hardly knew him, and he was only a third or fourth cousin, anyway, was n't he? Why, we never even thought of going to the funeral!"

"I know; but he was a queer old codger, and he took a great fancy to you when he saw you. Don't you remember? Anyhow, the deed is done."

"And it's ours? — a whole automobile?"

"That's what they say — and it's a three-thousand-dollar car."

"Oh, Herbert!" When Jessica was pleased

she clapped her hands; she clapped them now — or rather she clapped the eggs — and in the resulting disaster even the automobile was for a moment forgetten. But for only a moment.

"And to think how we 've wanted an automobile!" she cried, when the impromptu omelet in her lap had been banished into oblivion. "The rides we 'll have — and *we* won't be pigs! *We 'll* take our friends!"

"Indeed we will," agreed Herbert.

"And our trips and vacations, and even down town — why, we won't need any carfare. We'll save money, Herbert, lots of money!"

"Er — well, an auto costs something to run, you know," ventured Herbert.

"Gasoline, 'course! — but what 's a little gasoline? I fancy we can afford that when we get the whole car for nothing!"

"Well, I should say!" chuckled the man.

"Where is it now?"

"In the garage on the estate," returned Herbert, consulting his letter. "I'm requested to take it away."

"Requested! Only fancy! As if we were n't dying to take it away!"

"Yes, but — how?" The man's face had grown suddenly perplexed.

"Why, go and get it, of course."

"But one can't walk in and pocket a motor-car as one would a package of greenbacks."

"Of course not! But you can get it and run it home. It's only fifty miles, anyhow."

"I don't know how to run an automobile. Besides, there 's licenses and things that have to be 'tended to first, I think."

"Well, *somebody* can run it, can't there?"

"Well, yes, I suppose so. But — where are we going to keep it?"

"Herbert Wheeler, one would think you were displeased that we 've been given this automobile. As if it mattered *where* we kept it, so long as we had it to keep!"

"Yes, but — really, Jessica, we can't keep it here — in the kitchen," he cried. "It 's smashed two eggs already, just the mention of it," he finished whimsically.

"But there *are* places — garages and things, Herbert; you know there are."

"Yes, but they — cost something."

"I know it; but if the car is ours for nothing,

seems as if we might be able to afford its board and keep!"

"Well, by George! it does, Jessica; that's a fact," cried the man, starting to his feet. "There 's Dearborn's down to the Square. I 'll go and see them about it. They 'll know, too, how to get it here. I'll go down right after supper. And, by the way, how about that omelet? Did our new automobile leave any eggs to make one?"

"Well, a few," laughed Jessica.

There was no elation in Herbert Wheeler's step when, two hours later, the young bank teller came home from Dearborn's.

"Well, I guess we — we're up against it, Jessica," he groaned.

"What 's the matter? Won't they take it? Never mind; there are others."

"Oh, yes, they 'll take it and take care of it for fifteen or twenty dollars a month, according to the amount of work I have them do on it."

"Why, I never heard of such a thing! Does it cost that — all that? But then, the *car* does n't cost anything," she added soothingly, after a pause.

"Oh, no, the car does n't cost anything — only eight or ten dollars to bring it down by train, or else two dollars an hour for a chauffeur to run it down for us," retorted her husband.

"Eight or ten dollars! Two dollars an hour to run it!" gasped Jessica. "Why, Herbert, what shall we do? There is only ten dollars now of the household money to last the rest of the month; and there 's this week's grocery bill and a dollar and a half for the laundry to pay!"

"That 's exactly it — what shall we do?" snapped Herbert. This thing was getting on his nerves.

"But we must do," laughed Jessica hysterically. "The idea of giving up a three-thousand-dollar automobile because one owes a grocery bill and a dollar and a half for laundry!"

"Well, we can't eat the automobile, and 't won't wash our clothes for us."

"Naturally not! Who wants it to?" Jessica's nerves, also, were feeling the strain.

"We might — sell it."

"Sell it! Sell our automobile!" flamed Jessica; and to hear her, one would think the

proposition was to sell an old family heirloom, beloved for years.

Her husband sighed.

"Is n't there something somewhere about selling the pot to get something to put into it?" he muttered dismally, as he rose to lock up the house for the night. "Well, I fancy that 's what we 'll have to do — sell the automobile to get money enough to move it!"

Two days later the automobile came. Perhaps the grocer waited. Perhaps the laundry bill went unpaid Perhaps an obliging friend advanced a loan. Whatever it was, spic and span in Dearborn's garage stood the three-thousand-dollar automobile, the admired of every eye.

June had gone, and July was weeks old, however, before the preliminaries of license and lessons were over, and Mr. and Mrs. Herbert Wheeler could enter into the full knowledge of what it meant to be the joyous possessors of an automobile which one could run one's self.

"And now we 'll take our friends," cried Jessica. "Who 'll go first?"

"Let 's begin with the A's — the Arnolds. They 're always doing things for us."

"Good! I'll telephone Mrs. Arnold to-night. To-morrow is Saturday, half-holiday. We 'll take them down to the lake and come home by moonlight. Oh, Herbert, won't it be lovely?"

"You bet it will," exulted Herbert, as he thought of the Arnolds' admiring eyes when their car should sweep up to their door.

At three o'clock Saturday afternoon the Wheelers with their two guests started for the lake. It was a beautiful day. The road was good and every one was in excellent spirits — that is, every one but the host. It had come to him suddenly with overwhelming force that he was responsible not only for the happiness but for the lives of his wife and their friends. What if something should go wrong?

But nothing did go wrong. He stopped twice, it is true, and examined carefully his car; but the only result of his search was a plentiful bedaubing of oil and gasoline on his hands and of roadway dust on his clothing. He was used to this and did not mind it, however — until he went in to dinner at the Lakeside House beside the fresh daintiness of his wife and their friends; then he did mind it.

The ride home was delightful, so the Arnolds said. The Arnolds talked of it, indeed, to each other, until they fell asleep — but even then they did not talk of it quite so long as their host worked cleaning up the car after the trip. Wheeler kept the automobile now in a neighbor's barn and took care of it himself; it was much cheaper than keeping it in Dearborn's garage.

There were several other friends in the A's and B's and two in the C's who were taken out in the Wheeler automobile before Herbert one day groaned:

"Jessica, this alphabet business is killing me. It does seem as if Z never would be reached!"

"Why, Herbert! — and they 're all our friends, and you know how much they think of it."

"I think of it, too, when the dinner checks and the supper checks come in. Jessica, we just simply can't stand it!"

Jessica frowned and sighed.

"I know, dear; but when the *car* did n't cost anything —"

"Well, lobster salads and chicken patties cost something," mentioned the man grimly.

"I know it; but it seems so — so selfish to go all by ourselves with those empty seats behind us. And there are so many I have promised to take. Herbert, what can we do?"

"I don't know; but I know what we can't do. We can't feed them to the tune of a dollar or two a plate any longer."

There was a long pause; then Jessica clapped her hands.

"Herbert, I have it! We'll have basket picnics. I'll take a lunch from the house every time. And, after all, that'll be lots nicer; don't you think so?"

"Well, that might do," acquiesced the man slowly. "Anyhow, there would n't be any dinner checks a-coming."

August passed and September came. The Wheelers were in "M" now; they had been for days, indeed. Even home-prepared luncheons were beyond the Wheelers' pocketbook now, and no friend had been invited to ride for a week past. The spoiling of two tires and a rather serious accident to the machine had necessitated the Wheelers spending every spare cent for repairs.

In the eyes of most of the town the Wheelers were objects of envy. *They* had an automobile. *They* could ride while others must plod along behind them on foot, blinded by their dust and sickened by their noisome odor of gasoline.

As long as the Wheelers were "decently hospitable" about sharing their car, the townspeople added to their envy an interested tolerance based on a lively speculation as to when one's own turn for a ride would come; but when a whole week went by, and not one of the many anxious would-be guests had been invited, the interest and the tolerance fled, leaving only an angry disdain as destructive to happiness as was the gasoline smell of the car itself.

There were some things, however, that the townspeople did not know. They did not know that, though the Wheelers had a motor-car, they had almost nothing else; no new clothes, except dust coats and goggles; no new books and magazines, except such as dealt with "the practical upkeep and operation of a car"; no leisure, for the car must be kept repaired and shining; no fresh vegetables to eat, for the garden had died long ago from want of care,

and they could buy only gasoline. But they did have an automobile. This much the town knew; and there came a day when this fact loomed large and ominous on the horizon of the Wheelers' destiny.

On the first day of October the bank in which young Wheeler worked closed its doors. There had been a defalcation. A large sum of money was missing, and the long finger of suspicion pointed to Herbert Wheeler.

Did he not sport an automobile? Was he not living far beyond his means? Had not the Wheelers for weeks past flaunted their ill-gotten wealth in the very eyes of the whole town? To be sure they had. The idea, indeed, of a twelve-hundred-dollar-a-year clerk trying to cut a dash like that! As if every one could not guess just where had gone that missing sum of money.

And so the town talked and wagged its head, and back in the tiny house in the midst of its unkept lawn and garden sat the angry, frightened, and appalled Herbert Wheeler, and Jessica, his wife.

In vain did the Wheelers point out that the

automobile was a gift. In vain did they bare to doubting eyes the whole pitiful poverty of their daily life. The town refused to see or to understand; in the town's eyes was the vision of the Wheeler automobile flying through the streets with selfishly empty seats; in the town's nose was the hateful smell of gasoline. Nothing else signified.

To the bank examiners, however, something else did signify. But it took their sworn statement, together with the suicide of Cashier Jewett (the proved defaulter), to convince the town; and even then the town shook its head and said:

"Well, it might have been that automobile, anyhow!"

The Wheelers sold their elephant — their motor-car.

"Yes, I think we 'd better sell it," agreed Jessica tearfully, when her husband made the proposition. "Of course the car did n't cost us anything, but we — "

"Cost us anything!" cut in Herbert Wheeler wrathfully. "Cost us anything! Why, it 's done

nothing but cost from the day it smashed those two eggs in the kitchen to the day it almost smashed my reputation at the bank. Why, Jessica, it 's cost us everything—food, clothing, fun, friends, and almost life itself! I think we 'll sell that automobile."

And they sold it.

A Patron of Art

MRS. LIVINGSTONE adored art — Art with a capital A, not the kind whose sign-manual is a milking-stool or a beribboned picture frame. The family had lived for some time in a shabby-genteel house on Beacon Hill, ever since, indeed, Mrs. Livingstone had insisted on her husband's leaving the town of his birth and moving to Boston — the center of Art (according to Mrs. Livingstone).

Here she attended the Symphony Concerts (on twenty-five cent tickets), and prattled knowingly of Mozart and Beethoven; and here she listened to Patti or Bernhardt from the third balcony of the Boston Theater. If she attended an exhibit of modern paintings she saw no beauty in pictured face or flower, but longed audibly for the masterpieces of Rubens and of Titian; and she ignored the ordinary books and periodicals of the day, even to the newspapers, and adorned her center-table with copies of Shakespeare and of Milton.

To be sure, she occasionally read a novel or a book of poems a trifle less ancient in character, but never unless the world had rung with the author's praises for at least a score of years. The stamp of Time's approval was absolutely necessary to the aspirant after Mrs. Livingstone's approbation. Indeed, there was only one of the present-day celebrities who interested the good lady at all, but that one attracted with a power that compensated for any lack in the others. She would have given much — had it been hers to give — to once meet that man.

Of course he was famous — he had been for thirty years. She called him the "Inimitable One," and set him up in her heart and groveled joyfully at his feet. She bought each of his books when published, whether she had shoes to her feet or clothes to her back. He was the Prophet — the High Priest — the embodiment of Art. She occasionally even allowed his books to rest on the table along with Milton and Shakespeare.

Mrs. Livingstone's husband was only an ordinary being who knew nothing whatever of

Art; and it was a relief to her — and perhaps to him, poor man — when he departed this life, and left her to an artistic widowhood with anything but an artistic income — if size counts in Art. But one must eat, and one must wear clothes (in chilly, civilized Boston, at least), and Mrs. Livingstone suddenly realized that something must be done toward supplying these necessities of life for herself and her young daughter, Mabel.

It was at about this time that there came a sharp ring at the doorbell, and a stout man with small, but very bright, black eyes asked to see Mrs. Livingstone.

"I have come, my dear madam, on a matter of business," said he suavely; "and though I am a stranger to you, you certainly are not one to me. I said 'business,' madam, yet I and the one for whom I am speaking are so anxious that you should look favorably upon our proposition that I had almost said that I had come to ask a favor."

Mrs. Livingstone relaxed from the forbidding aspect she had assumed, and looked mildly interested.

"A gentleman wishes to leave his house in your charge, madam. The house is advertised for sale, and from time to time parties may wish to see it. He would like it to be in the care of some one who will understand how to show it to the best advantage, you see."

Mrs. Livingstone's back straightened, and her chin rose perceptibly. Had she come to this — a common caretaker? And yet — there was Mabel. Something must certainly be done.

"Who is this man?" she asked aggressively; and then she almost started from her chair as the name fell from the other's lips — it was that borne by the Inimitable One.

"That man!" she exclaimed breathlessly. "That famous creature with the world at his feet!"

The stout gentleman opposite smiled, and his little eyes narrowed to mere slits of light. He had counted on this. His employer was indeed famous — very famous, though perhaps not in the way this good lady supposed. It was not the first time he had traded on this convenient similarity of names.

"I thought, madam, we had made no mis-

take. I was sure you would deem it a privilege. And as for us, your keen appreciative sense of the fitness of things will — er — will make it a favor to us if you comply with our request," said he, floundering in helpless confusion for a moment.

But Mrs. Livingstone did not notice. She went through the rest of that interview in a dazed, ecstatic wonder. She only knew at its conclusion that she was to go up to Vermont to care for His house, to live in the rooms that He had lived in, to rest where He had rested, to walk where He had walked, to see what He had seen. And she was to receive pay — money for this blissful privilege. Incredible!

It did not take Mrs. Livingstone long to make all necessary arrangements. The shabby-genteel house in Boston was rented by the month, all furnished, and the good lady promptly gave her notice and packed her trunks for departure. The first day of the month found her and her daughter whirling away from the city toward their destination.

As they stepped from the train to the platform at the little country station, Mrs. Living-

stone looked about her with awed interest. He had been here! The jouncing yellow stage coach became a hallowed golden chariot, and the ride to the house a sacred pilgrimage. She quoted His poetry on the doorstep, and entered the hall with a reverent obeisance; whereupon the man who brought the trunks ever after referred to her with a significant tap on his forehead and the single word "cracked."

"Only think, Mabel, He walked here, and sat here," said the woman adoringly, suiting the action to the word and sinking into a great Morris chair.

Mabel sniffed her disdain.

"I presume so; but I should like to know where he ate — maybe he left something!"

Mrs. Livingstone rose in despairing resignation.

"Just like your father, child. No conception of anything but the material things of life. I did hope my daughter would have some sympathy with me; but it seems she has n't. Bring me my bag — the black one; the lunch is in that. Of course we can't have a warm supper until we get started."

The next few days were a dream of bliss to Mrs. Livingstone. The house was a handsome mansion set well back from the street, and surrounded by beautiful grounds which were kept in order by a man who came two or three times a week to attend to them. Mrs. Livingstone had but herself and Mabel to care for, and she performed the work of the house as a high-priestess might have attended upon the altars of her gods. It was on the fifth day that a growing wonder in the mind of Mrs. Livingstone found voice.

"Mabel, there is n't one of His works in the house — not one. I've been everywhere!" said the woman plaintively.

"Well, mother," laughed the girl saucily, "that 's the most sensible thing I ever knew of the man. I don't wonder he did n't want them round — I should n't!"

"Mabel!"

"Well, I should n't!" And Mabel laughed wickedly while her mother sighed at the outspoken heresy. It was plain that Mabel had no soul.

Mrs. Livingstone was furthermore surprised

at her idol's taste in art; some of the pictures on the wall were a distinct shock to her. And if the absence of the Inimitable One's works astonished her, the presence of some others' books certainly did more than that.

The house was to be sold completely furnished, with the exception of the books and pictures. The price was high, and there were but few prospective purchasers. Occasionally people came to see the property; such Mrs. Livingstone conducted about the house with reverent impressiveness, displaying its various charms much as a young mother would "show off" her baby.

"It is something to buy a house owned by so famous a man," she insinuated gently one day, after vainly trying to awaken a proper enthusiasm in a prim little woman who was talking of purchasing.

"Indeed!" replied the other, frigidly. "Do you think so? I must confess it is somewhat of a drawback to me." And from that time Mrs. Livingstone wore an injured air — the young mother's baby had been snubbed — grievously snubbed.

There were times when Mrs. Livingstone was lonely. Only one of her neighbors had called, and that one had not repeated the visit. Perhaps the lady's report — together with that of the trunkman — was not conducive to further acquaintance. It would appear so.

Toward the last of the summer a wild plan entered Mrs. Livingstone's brain; and after some days of trembling consideration, she determined to carry it out. The morning mail bore a letter from her to the Inimitable One through his publishers. She had learned that he was to be in Boston, and she had written to beg him to come up to his old home and see if it was being cared for to his satisfaction. The moments dragged as though weighted with lead until the answer came. When at last it was in her hands, she twisted a hairpin under the flap of the envelope and tore out the letter with shaking fingers.

It was from the Inimitable One's private secretary. The Inimitable One did not understand her letter — he was the owner of no house in Vermont; there was doubtless some mistake. That was all. The communication was wholly enigmatic.

The letter fluttered to the floor, and Mrs. Livingstone's dazed eyes rested on the gardener in the lawn below. In a moment she was at his side.

"Peter, is n't this house owned by a very famous man?"

"Indade it is, ma'am."

"Who is he?" she demanded shortly, holding her breath until that familiar name borne by the Inimitable One passed the other's lips.

"Well, Peter, is n't he the writer? What does he do for a living?" she faltered, still mystified.

"Do? He fights, ma'am. He 's the big prize-fighter that won —" He was talking to empty air. The woman had fled.

When Polly Ann Played Santa Claus

The Great Idea and What Came of It

MARGARET BRACKETT turned her head petulantly from side to side on the pillow. "I'm sure I don't see why this had to come to me now," she moaned.

Polly Ann Brackett, who had been hastily summoned to care for her stricken relative, patted the pillow hopefully.

"Sho! now, Aunt Margaret, don't take on so. Just lie still and rest. You 're all beat out. That 's what 's the matter."

The sick woman gave an impatient sigh.

"But, Polly Ann, it 's only the 22d. I ought not to be that — yet! It never comes until the 26th, and I 'm prepared for it then. Sarah Bird comes Christmas Day, you know."

Polly Ann's jaw dropped. Her eyes stared frankly.

"Sarah Bird!" she cried. "You don't mean

you engaged her beforehand — a *nurse!* That you knew you 'd need her!"

"Of course. I do every year. Polly Ann, don't stare so! As if Christmas did n't use every one up — what with the shopping and all the planning and care it takes!"

"But I thought Christmas was a — a pleasure," argued Polly Ann feebly; "something to enjoy. Not to — to get sick over."

"Enjoy — yes, though not to be taken lightly, understand," returned the elder woman with dignity. "It is no light thing to select and buy suitable, appropriate gifts. And now, with half of them to be yet tied up and labeled, here I am, flat on my back," she finished with a groan.

"Can't I do it? Of course I can!" cried Polly Ann confidently.

The sick woman turned with troubled eyes.

"Why, I suppose you'll have to do it," she sighed, "as long as I can't. Part of them are done up, anyway; but there 's John's family and Mary and the children left. John's are in the middle drawer of the bureau in the attic hall, and Mary's are in the big box near it. You'll

know them right away when you see them. There's paper and strings and ribbons, and cards for the names, besides the big boxes to send them in. Seems as if you ought to do it right, only — well, you know how utterly irresponsible and absent-minded you are sometimes."

"Nonsense!" scoffed Polly Ann. "As if I could n't do up a parcel of presents as well as you! And I'll prove it, too. I'll go right up now," she declared, rising to her feet and marching out of the room.

In the attic hall Polly Ann found the presents easily. She knew which was for which, too; she knew Margaret and her presents of old. She did not need the little bits of paper marked, "For Mary," "For Tom," "For John," "For Julia," to tell her that the woolen gloves and thick socks went into Mary's box, and the handsomely bound books and the fine lace-edged handkerchief into John's.

Mary, as all the Bracketts knew, was the poor relation that had married shiftless Joe Hemenway, who had died after a time, leaving behind him a little Joe and three younger girls

and a boy. John, if possible even better known to the Brackett family, was the millionaire Congressman to whom no Brackett ever failed to claim relationship with a proudly careless "He 's a cousin of ours, you know, Congressman Brackett is."

At once Polly Ann began her task. And then —

It was the French doll that did it. Polly Ann was sure of that, as she thought it over afterward. From the middle drawer where were John's presents the doll fell somehow into the box where were Mary's. There the fluffy gold of the doll's hair rioted gloriously across a pair of black woolen socks, and the blue satin of its gown swept glistening folds of sumptuousness across a red flannel petticoat. One rose-tipped waxen hand, outflung, pointed, almost as if in scorn, to the corner of the box where lay another doll, a doll in a brown delaine dress, a doll whose every line from her worsted-capped head to her black-painted feet spelled durability and lack of charm.

Polly Ann saw this, and sighed. She was thinking of Mary's little crippled Nellie for

whom the brown delaine doll was designed; and she was remembering what that same Nellie had said one day, when they had paused before a window wherein stood another just such a little satin-clad lady as this interloper from the middle bureau drawer.

"Oh, Cousin Polly, look — look!" Nellie had breathed. "Is n't she be-yu-tiful? Oh, Cousin Polly, if — if I had — one — like that, I don't think I'd mind even *these* — much," she choked, patting the crutches that supported her.

Polly Ann had sighed then, and had almost sobbed aloud as she disdainfully eyed her own thin little purse, whose contents would scarcely have bought the gown that Miss Dolly wore. She sighed again now, as she picked up the doll before her, and gently smoothed into order the shining hair. If only this were for Nellie! — but it was n't. It was for Julia's Roselle, Roselle who already possessed a dozen French dolls, and would probably possess as many more before her doll days were over, while Nellie —

With a swift movement Polly Ann dropped the doll back into the box, and picked up the other one. The next moment the brown delaine

dress was rubbing elbows with a richly bound book and a Duchesse lace collar in the middle bureau drawer. Polly Ann cocked her head to one side and debated; did she dare ask Aunt Margaret to make the change?

With a slow shake of her head she owned that she did not. She knew her aunt and her aunt's convictions as to the ethics of present-giving too well. And, if she were tempted to doubt, there were the two sets of presents before her, both of which, even down to the hemp twine and brown paper in one and the red ribbons and white tissue-paper in the other, proclaimed their donor's belief as to the proper distribution of usefulness and beauty.

The two dolls did look odd in their present environment. Polly Ann admitted that. Reluctantly she picked them up, and was about to return each to her own place, when suddenly the Great Idea was born.

With a little cry and a tense biting of her lip Polly Ann fell back before it. Then excitedly she leaned forward, and examined with searching eyes the presents. She drew a long breath, and stood erect again.

"Well, why not?" she asked herself. Aunt Margaret had said she was utterly irresponsible and absent-minded. Very well, then; she would be utterly irresponsible and absent-minded. She would change the labels and misdirect the boxes. John's should go to Mary, and Mary's to John. Nellie should have that doll. Incidentally Nellie's mother and sisters and brother and grandmother should have, too, for once in their starved lives, a Christmas present that did not shriek durability the moment the wrappings fell away.

It was nothing but fun for Polly Ann after this. With unafraid hands she arranged the two sets of presents on the top of the bureau, and planned their disposal. Mentally she reviewed the two families. In Mary's home there were Mary herself; Joe, eighteen; Jennie, sixteen; Carrie, fourteen; Tom, eleven; and Nellie, six; besides Grandma. In John's there were John, his wife, Julia; their son Paul, ten; and daughter Roselle, four; besides John's younger sister Barbara, eighteen, and his mother.

It took a little planning to make the presents for six on the one hand do for seven on the

"WELL, WHY NOT?" SHE ASKED HERSELF

other, and *vice versa;* but with a little skillful dividing and combining it was done at last to Polly Ann's huge satisfaction. Then came the tying-up and the labeling. And here again Polly Ann's absent-mindedness got in its fine work; for the red ribbons and the white tissue-paper went into Mary's box, which left, of course, only the brown paper and hemp twine for John's.

"There!" sighed Polly Ann when the boxes themselves were at last tied up and addressed. "Now we 'll see what we shall see!" But even Polly Ann, in spite of her bravely upheld chin, trembled a little as she turned toward the room where Margaret Brackett lay sick.

It was a pity, as matters were, that Polly Ann could not have been a fly on the wall of Mary's sitting-room at that moment, for Mary's Jennie was saying gloomily, "I suppose, mother, we'll have Cousin Margaret's Christmas box as usual."

"I suppose so," her mother answered. Then with a determined cheerfulness came the assertion, "Cousin Margaret is always very kind and thoughtful, you know, Jennie."

There was a pause, broken at last by a mutinous "I don't think so, mother."

"Why, *Jennie!*"

"Well, I don't. She may be kind, but she is n't — thoughtful."

"Why, my daughter!" remonstrated the shocked mother again. "I'm ashamed of you!"

"I know; it 's awful, of course, but I can't help it," declared the girl. "If she really were thoughtful, she 'd think sometimes that we 'd like something for presents besides flannel things."

"But they're so — sensible, Jennie, for — us."

"That 's just what they are — sensible," retorted the girl bitterly. "But who wants sensible things always? We *have* to have them the whole year through. Seems as if at Christmas we might have something — foolish."

"Jennie, Jennie, what are you saying? and when Cousin Margaret is so good to us, too! Besides, she does send us candy always, and — and that 's foolish."

"It would be if 't was nice candy, the kind we can't hope ever to buy ourselves. But it is n't. It 's the cheap Christmas candy, two

pounds for a quarter, the kind we have to buy when we buy any. Mother, it's just that; don't you see? Cousin Margaret thinks that's the only sort of thing that's fit for us! cheap, sensible things, the kind of things we have to buy. But that does n't mean that we would n't like something else, or that we have n't any taste, just because we have n't the means to gratify it," finished the girl chokingly as she hurried out of the room before her mother could reply.

All this, however, Polly Ann did not hear, for Polly Ann was not a fly on Mary's sitting-room wall.

On Christmas Day Sarah Bird appeared, cheerfully ready to take charge of her yearly patient; and Polly Ann went home. In less than a week, however, Polly Ann was peremptorily sent for by the sick woman. Polly Ann had expected the summons and was prepared; yet she shook in her shoes when she met her kinswoman's wrathful eyes.

"Polly Ann, *what* did you do with those presents?" demanded Margaret Brackett abruptly.

"P-presents?" Polly Ann tried to steady her voice.

"Yes, yes, the ones for Mary and John's family."

"Why, I did them up and sent them off, to be sure. Did n't they get 'em?"

"Get them!" groaned Margaret Brackett, "get them! Polly Ann, what did you do? You must have mixed them awfully somehow!"

"Mixed them?" In spite of her preparation for this very accusation Polly Ann was fencing for time.

"Yes, mixed them. Look at that — and that — and that," cried the irate woman, thrusting under Polly Ann's nose one after another of the notes of thanks she had received the day before.

They were from John and his family, and one by one Polly Ann picked them up and read them.

John, who had not for years, probably, worn anything coarser than silk on his feet, expressed in a few stiff words his thanks for two pairs of black woolen socks. Julia, famed for the dainty slenderness of her hands, expressed in even stiffer language her thanks for a pair of gray woolen gloves. She also begged to thank Cousin

Margaret for the doll so kindly sent Roselle and for the red mittens sent to Paul. John's mother, always in the minds of those who knew her associated with perfumed silks and laces, wrote a chilly little note of thanks for a red flannel petticoat; while John's sister, Barbara, worth a million in her own right, scrawled on gold-monogrammed paper her thanks for the dozen handkerchiefs that had been so kindly sent her in the Christmas box.

"And there were n't a dozen handkerchiefs, I tell you," groaned Margaret, "except the cotton ones I sent to Mary's two girls, Jennie and Carrie, six to each. Think of it — cotton handkerchiefs to Barbara Marsh! And that red flannel petticoat, and those ridiculous gloves and socks! Oh, Polly Ann, Polly Ann, how could you have done such a thing, and got everything so hopelessly mixed? There was n't a thing, not a single thing right but that doll for Roselle."

Polly Ann lifted her head suddenly.

"Have you heard from — Mary?" she asked in a faint voice.

"Not yet. But I shall, of course. I suppose

they got John's things. Imagine it! Mary Hemenway and a Duchesse lace collar!"

"Oh, but Mary would like that," interposed Polly Ann feverishly. "You know she 's invited out a good deal in a quiet way, and a bit of nice lace does dress up a plain frock wonderfully."

"Nonsense! As if she knew or cared whether it was Duchesse or — or imitation Val! She 's not used to such things, Polly Ann. She would n't know what to do with them if she had them. While John and Julia — dear, dear, what shall I do? Think of it — a red flannel petticoat to Madam Marsh!"

Polly Ann laughed. A sudden vision had come to her of Madam Marsh as she had seen her last at a family wedding clad in white lace and amethysts, and with an amethyst tiara in her beautifully dressed hair.

Margaret Brackett frowned.

"It 's no laughing matter, Polly Ann," she said severely. "I shall write to both families and explain, of course. In fact, I have done that already to John and Julia. But nothing, *nothing* can take away my mortification that such a thing

should have occurred at all. And when I took so much pains in selecting those presents, to get suitable ones for both boxes. I can't forgive you, Polly Ann; I just can't. And, what 's more, I don't see how in the world you did it. I am positive that I had each thing marked carefully, and —"

She did not finish her sentence. Sarah Bird brought in a letter, and with a petulant exclamation Margaret Brackett tore it open.

"It 's from Mary," she cried as soon as Sarah Bird had left the room; "and — goodness, look at the length of it! Here, you read it, Polly Ann. It 's lighter by the window." And she passed the letter to her niece.

Dear Cousin Margaret [read Polly Ann aloud]: I wonder if I can possibly tell you what that Christmas box was to us. I'm going to try, anyway; but I don't believe, even then, that you'll quite understand it, for you never were just as we are, and you'd have to be to know what that box was to us.

You see we can't buy nice things, really nice things, ever. There are always so many "have-to-gets" that there is never anything left for the "want-to-gets"; and so we had to do without —

till your box came. And then — but just let me tell you what did happen when it did come.

The expressman brought it Christmas Eve, and Joe opened it at once. Mother and I and all the children stood around watching him. You should have heard the "Ohs!" and "Ahs!" of delight when the pretty white packages all tied with red ribbons were brought to light. By the way, Nellie has captured all those red ribbons, and her entire family of dolls is rejoicing in a Merry Christmas of their own in consequence.

As for the presents themselves — I don't know where to begin or how to say it; but I'll begin with myself, and try to make you understand.

That beautiful Duchesse lace collar! I love it already, and I'm actually vain as a peacock over it. I had made over mother's black silk for myself this fall, and I did so want some nice lace for it! You've no idea how beautiful, really beautiful, the dress looks with that collar. I shan't cry now when I'm invited anywhere. It's a pity, and I'm ashamed that it is so; but clothes do make such a difference.

Mother is fairly reveling in that lovely silk and lace workbag. She has carried it with her all day all over the house, just to look at it, she says. She has always wanted some such thing, but never thought she ought to take the money to buy one. She and two or three other old ladies in the neighborhood have a way of exchanging afternoon visits with their work; and mother is as

pleased as a child now, and is impatiently awaiting the next "meet" so she can show off her new treasure. Yet, to see her with it, one would think she had always carried silk workbags, scented with lavender.

Joe is more than delighted with his handsome set of books. And really they do lighten our dull sitting-room wonderfully, and we are all proud of them. He is planning to read them aloud to us all this winter, and I am so glad. I am particularly glad, for we not only shall have the pleasure of hearing the stories themselves, but I shall have the satisfaction of knowing where my boy is evenings. Joe is a good lad always, but he has been worrying me a little lately, for he seemed to like to be away so much. Yet I could n't wonder, for I had so little to offer him at home for entertainment. Now I have these books.

Carrie is wild over her necklace of pretty stones. She says they're "all the rage" at school among the girls, and the very latest thing out. Dear child! she does so love pretty things, and of course I can't give them to her. It is the same with Jennie, and she is equally pleased with that dainty lace-edged handkerchief. It is such a nice handkerchief, and Jennie, like her mother, does so love nice things!

Tom was almost speechless with joy when he discovered that sumptuous knife. But he has n't been speechless since — not a bit of it! There is n't any one anywhere within the radius of a

mile, I guess, to whom he has n't shown every blade and corkscrew and I don't-know-what-all that that wonderful knife can unfold.

I've left Nellie till the last, but not because she is the least. Poor dear little girlie! My heart aches now that I realize how she has longed for a beautiful doll, one that could open and shut its eyes, say "Papa" and "Mamma," and one that was daintily dressed. I had no idea the little thing would be so overcome. She turned white, then red, and actually sobbed with joy when the doll was put into her arms, though since then she has been singing all over the house, and has seemed so happy. I'm sure you will believe this when I tell you that I overheard her last night whisper into dolly's ear that now she did n't mind half so much not being like other girls who could run and play, because she had her to love and care for.

And then the candy that was marked for all of us — and such candy! All their lives the children have longingly gazed at such candy through store windows, and dreamed what it might taste like; but to have it right in their hands — in their *mouths!* You should have heard their rapturous sighs of content as it disappeared.

And now, dear Cousin Margaret, can you see a little what that Christmas box has been to us? I can't bear to say, "Thank you"; it seems so commonplace and inadequate. And yet there is n't anything else I can say. And we do thank

you, each and every one of us. We thank you both for our own gift, and for all the others, for each one's gift is making all the others happy. Do you see? Oh, I hope you do see and that you do understand that we appreciate all the care and pains you must have taken to select just the present that each of us most longed for.

Lovingly and gratefully yours,

MARY.

Polly Ann's voice quivered into silence. It had already broken once or twice, and it was very husky toward the last. For a moment no one spoke; then with an evident attempt at carelessness Margaret said: "I guess, Polly Ann, I won't write to Mary at all that there was any mistake. We 'll let it — pass."

There was no answer. Twice Polly Ann opened her lips, but no sound came. After a moment she got to her feet, and walked slowly across the room. At the door she turned abruptly.

"Aunt Margaret," she panted, "I suppose I ought to tell you. There wa'n't any — mistake. I — I changed those presents on purpose." Then she went out quickly and shut the door.

THE END

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